LITERARY CRITICISM: A SHORT HISTORY

4 Volume set

William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks

ROUTLEDGE

LITERARY CRITICISM:
A SHORT HISTORY

Volume 1

CLASSICAL CRITICISM

INTRODUCTION

IT IS NOT LIKELY THAT A PERSON WHO ENTERTAINS EVEN A MODEST prejudice against the kind of history writing which appears in this book will have his mind changed by introductory apologetics. Still some preliminary advertisement of aims may be only fair—and may even be generally helpful to a receptive reading. The first principle on which we would insist is that of continuity and intelligibility in the history of literary argument. Plato has a bearing on Croce and Freud, and vice versa. Or, all three of these theorists are engaged with a common reality and hence engage one another through the medium of that reality and either come to terms or disagree. Literary problems occur not just because history produces them, but because literature is a thing of such and such a sort, showing such and such a relation to the rest of human experience. True, languages and cultures, times and places, differ widely. The literary historian will always do well to nurse a certain skepticism about the thoroughness with which he may be penetrating the secret of his documents. But then he has to worry too about an opposite danger of being merely and overly skeptical. There are techniques of caution and neutrality which put the historian somewhat in the position of the student who, having his difficulties with a Latin or German reading examination, is content to put down a translation that does not make sense. He writes as if he is not convinced that the foreign language does make sense. Our own notion of how to write a history of literary ideas is just the opposite of that. The history is bound to be an interpretation, in part even a translation. In part it will even be built on reasonable guesses. The least it can do is make sense.

And that connects closely with a second of our main notions about method; namely, that a history of literary ideas can scarcely escape being written from a point of view. It seems to us that on a strictly neutral plan there can be in fact no history of literary ideas at all, nor, for that matter, any direct history of literature. At least not any history that hangs together. This book, we hope and believe, both grows out of and illustrates and contributes to a certain distinct point of view. It is the history of one kind of thinking about values, and hence it could not have been written relativistically, or indifferently, or at random. It contains much praise and blame, both implicit and explicit. There are even senses, complimentary we believe, in which it could be called "polemic" or "argumentative." It is nevertheless, we contend, a true history. Call it *An Argumentative History of Literary Argument in the West.*

The reader will now readily conceive yet another of our notions: namely, that in a history of this sort the critical *idea* has priority over all

other kinds of material. The present "short" history does not attempt a grand assemblage of information (though information of the right kind and in the right amount, we believe, is here). Neither encyclopedism nor the Saintsburyan gigantically conversational range has been our purpose, but a series of narrative focusses precisely on ideas. In some chapters, especially in those concerning the neo-classic age, the argument runs directly along thematic lines. Other chapters, especially those concerning classical antiquity, are developed around certain heroic figures—Plato, or Aristotle, or Longinus. Still even in these chapters, the idea, not the hero, is always paramount. Hence it happens that we have attempted no complete account of any one philosopher or literary man (much less any complete survey of disciples or other minor figures). We have used the little figures, and even the great figures, as they came in handy to our narrative. Hence also we have been little interested in proving the consistency, we have been little dismayed by the frequent inconsistencies, of our great literary theorists. Where we have here and there noticed inconsistencies (as, let us say, in Addison's account of imagination, or in Arnold's account of classic grandeur and the "touchstones"), the point has been made not so much against the author as against a collection of ideas which have often been credited with more coherence than they actually exhibit. Or it has been made simply for the sake of gaining the expository advantage of contrast. By and large, as notably with Plato in the first chapter, we have preferred the idea in full bloom and have made no attempt to harmonize the smaller contradictions, real or apparent, which are always to be found in the canon of a prolific author. When the main ideas of an author have been leveled off or averaged in with all the marginal variations, the result is not a story with parts, contours, accents, climaxes, but a dead level of neutrality—the melted wax doll. The principle applies with equal force to themes and eras in intellectual history. Statistical scrupulosity in the study of "ideas" tends of course toward a smudge. This truth was never more clearly betrayed than in the following recommendation of minute history by a late distinguished American scholar:

> One of the surest evidences of a better understanding of an individual or a period is that sharp lines disappear, strong lights and shadows are modified, uniqueness and isolation melt away, the man is seen to be more like other men, the age like other ages.[1]

The present writers, despite their confidence in the continuity and real community of human experience through the ages,[2] are confident also

[1] R. D. Havens, "Changing Taste in the Eighteenth Century," *PMLA*, XLIV (June, 1929), 534–5.

[2] Some variations on the theme of the "universal" perhaps relevant to the present paradox are to be found near the end of Chapter 15.

of differences—of levels, depressions, and eminences—of the difference between Elizabethan England and Augustan Rome, of that between Chaucer and Pope, and of that between Pope and Blackmore, Dryden and Rymer.

The examples just mentioned invite allusion to one further methodological notion and one which is perhaps not very immediately entailed by what we have so far been saying. We have finally to confess what may seem to some of our more severely idealist friends a principle of distinct impurity in our method. Our book is not a history of general aesthetics (though a few quite limited excursions into the aesthetic ambient have been ventured). On the other hand, it is not a history of literary technicalities or techniques, of prosody or grammar. Yet if we had had to make a choice between a more markedly aesthetic direction and a more grammatical, it is the latter (in the full classical sense of the term "grammatical") which we should have chosen. That is, we have written a history of ideas about verbal art and about its elucidation and criticism. The ultimate object of our regard then, though seen at a remove, through the eyes of the critic and the theorist of criticism, has been poetry or literature. So much literary criticism and theory and so much of the best has been written by the men of letters. Often, whether consciously or not, they have written their general theories as a comment on their own best performances in poetry, and on the *kinds* of poetry which were most dear to them. The theory, furthermore, has been both stated and exemplified by the poems, and undoubtedly both poetry and theory have interacted in several ways. To show that the history of literary theory has been no more than a series of temporary explanations directed toward poetic vogues of the moment and hence that the name of "poetry" enjoys only a long record of equivocality, would be the final triumph of the neutrally and pluralistically minded investigator. Such (need it be said?) has scarcely been our aspiration. On the other hand, to show that through all the ambiguous weave and dialectical play of the successive concrete situations which make the history of poems and theory, the sustaining truth continues and may be discerned and its history written—this would seem to be an appropriate enough goal for the historian who believes that he has in fact a coherent, a real and unequivocal subject matter. To tell the story pure, as a series of internally driven developments of ideas or patterns of abstractly significant oppositions and resolutions, will have advantages for the philosopher. But to tell it more or less impurely, bringing in the colors of the literary milieu and allowing critical episodes to take shape out of the milieu, will have some advantages for the student of literature. In a few sentences of the Epilogue which concludes this book we have tried to sketch a view of how the several literary genre conceptions dominant in several ages—dramatic, epistolary, heroic, burlesque, and lyric—will if studied carefully open up not so many diverse views

into multiplicity and chaos but so many complementary insights into the one deeply rooted and perennial human truth which is the poetic principle.

As our chapter titles will suggest, the substance of the book includes Greek and Roman classicism, Renaissance, Augustan, romantic, and Victorian English criticism, and 20th-century English and American. In addition, there are excursions or inter-chapters or sections of chapters dealing with the Middle Ages and with main episodes in modern Italian, French, German, and Russian criticism. The book tries to follow the main lines of the critical heritage and then draw in the story toward the end to the immediate arena of the modern English-speaking world.

Any history of any subject has to begin somewhere—a matter perhaps of some embarrassment. Where it begins will be determined not only by the availability of certain documents but by the views of the author concerning the real nature of his subject. The present history might have lingered longer near its beginning than it actually does with certain proto-glimpses of literary critical consciousness in the Western tradition—invocations by the early Greek poets Homer and Hesiod to the Muses and assertions of an aim to teach or to charm, phrases of some pith and relevance concerning craft and genius or the fate of man, from early and all but lost lyric poets, from law-givers, dramatists, and pre-Socratic philosophers. The history as it actually begins, in our first chapter, plunges immediately, with only a few preliminary words, into an early Platonic dialogue, the *Ion*. This is the earliest extant Western writing that addresses itself deliberately, formally, and exclusively to the general matter of literary criticism. Furthermore this dialogue treats the topic of literary criticism in a way which the present writers conceive to be the correct way—that is, by asking a difficult question about the kind of knowledge which a criticism of a poem, or a poem itself, can lay claim to. What does a poem say that is worth listening to? What does criticism say? The entire course of literary theory and criticism, from the time of Plato to the present, has in effect been occupied with producing more or less acute versions of those questions and more or less accurate and telling answers. Plato's *Ion* is a thoroughgoing, radically naive, inquiry into the nature of poetic composition as a department of verbal meaning and power. It has also the advantage to the historian that it is a dialogue—that is, its arguments are put not purely and schematically but in dramatic form. There are two speakers and at least two points of view. The historian of critical ideas who takes such ideas in any degree tentatively, yet seriously, could scarcely find himself beginning on more congenial ground.

The supplementary passages which appear after most of the chapters in the book are intended to supply in part historical and theoretical di-

mensions which could not be conveniently handled in the narrative and in part illustrations or problems (some of them comic) which the meditative reader may enjoy placing for himself in relation to the themes of the narrative. Passages following a given chapter may stand either in harmony with one another or in opposition, and in various relations to the content of the chapter.

Quotations from Greek and Latin and from modern foreign languages appear for the most part in already available translations, which are appropriately acknowledged. But here and there the authors have for one reason or another attempted their own, perhaps rather free, translations. These appear for the most part without further advertisement.

This book would perhaps never have been begun except for a suggestion made to the authors a few years back by two friends, George W. Stewart and John Nerber. The authors wish to record their debt and express their gratitude.

The whole work has been written by a method of fairly close collaboration not only in the general plan but in the execution of each part. The authors have read and criticized each other's work closely and repeatedly at various stages. The substantial responsibility for the chapters is, however, to be divided as follows: Chapters 1–24, and 32, W. K. Wimsatt, Jr.; Chapters 25–31, Cleanth Brooks.

The parts of the book by W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., owe an obvious large debt to a Yale graduate English seminar, Theories of Poetry, inaugurated many years ago by Albert S. Cook, and conducted subsequently by F. A. Pottle and T. W. Copeland. To those founders, and especially to F. A. Pottle, and to the students in the course since 1942 and to those in its more recent undergraduate parallel, Introduction to Criticism, the author makes a grateful acknowledgement.

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A more or less pervasive debt in several chapters to a manuscript book by H. M. McLuhan concerning the ancient war between dialecticians and rhetoricians is here gratefully acknowledged and is underscored by the quotation, following Chapter 4, of two substantial excerpts from published essays by Mr. McLuhan.

To their colleagues Bernard Knox, Maynard Mack, John Palmer,

John Smith, and René Wellek, the authors are indebted for reading and criticism of various chapters in early drafts, and to Charles Feidelson, Charles C. Walcutt, and Father Walter J. Ong, S.J., for various kinds of critical advice. More than to any other single scholar, they are indebted for general theoretical and historical help to René Wellek. Not only his published but his yet unpublished works and his advice in conversation have done much to promote the writing of the modern chapters.

To Margaret and Tinkum, for labors expert, various, and unremitting, the authors join in affectionate expression of gratitude.

To Marshall Waingrow the authors owe special thanks for a skillful reading of the entire page proof. Alfred Stiernotte made the index.

Two fairly extended passages of Chapter 32, the Epilogue, follow an essay "Criticism Today: A Report from America," published by W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., in *Essays in Criticism*, VI (January, 1956), 1–21. Our thanks are due to F. W. Bateson, the editor.

ANNOTATIONS AND SOURCES

This book is annotated lightly. The notes aim at giving a guide to verifying our treatment of sources and a minimal clue to further reading. Certain works which have general relevance for the whole book or for major sections of it are brought together in the following list. At various places in the annotation, some of these works are cited by abbreviated titles or simply by names of their authors. The reader will easily understand such references on consulting the list.

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Titles of learned and critical journals are sometimes abbreviated in the notes, as follows:

AJP	*The American Journal of Philology*
ELH	*ELH: A Journal of English Literary History*
JEGP	*The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
JHI	*Journal of the History of Ideas*

MLN	*Modern Language Notes*
MLQ	*Modern Language Quarterly*
MLR	*The Modern Language Review*
MP	*Modern Philology*
PQ	*Philological Quarterly*
SP	*Studies in Philology*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*
RES	*The Review of English Studies*
TLS	*The Times Literary Supplement*

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CLASSICAL CRITICISM

A SHORT HISTORY

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CHAPTER I

SOCRATES AND THE RHAPSODE

§ *Early poets as critics,* The Frogs, *poetry in the scales—II. Plato's* Ion, *character of a rhapsode, character of Socrates, some embarrassing questions and unfortunate answers, the magnet and the iron rings, a light, winged and holy thing, poetry as inspiration, rhapsode vs. charioteer, pilot, and general, poetry as information—III. other works of Plato:* Meno, Phaedrus, *contradictory passages about inspiration,* Republic *and* Laws, *poetry and morals, poetry feeds and waters the passions, showing poets the gate, quarrel between poets and philosophers, Homer tells lies, poetry as imitation, the merely dramatic sense, the metaphysical sense, the painter and the three beds, the cinematic cave, the line and the four grades of knowledge—IV. Platonic "ideas,"* Phaedo, anamnēsis, Symposium, Phaedrus, *"love" and the "beautiful," the classic Platonic theme, varied senses of* to kalon, Philebus, *Xenophon's* Memorabilia, Greater Hippias—*V. reality and mathematics,* ratio, logos, *geometry of the five elements, visual art,* Philebus, *mixed pleasures,* Sophist, *eikastic and phantastic,* skiagraphia, *"dynamic symmetry," illusion and formalism, Cratylus and the image of Cratylus* §

BECAUSE POETS HAVE A STRONG TENDENCY TO FORM OPINIONS ABOUT THEIR craft and to use these opinions as part of the message of their poems, we are likely to find literary theory of a sort as far back as we can find poems. When Homer begins his epics with an invocation to the muse, he is uttering a theory about his poems—namely, that they are written, or had better be written, with the help of divine inspiration—and this is an idea which has played a considerable role in the sub-

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sequent history of poetics. During the several centuries that elapse between Homer and Plato, the first philosopher of literature whose ideas we shall examine with any care, other Greek writers, Hesiod, Solon, Simonides, Pindar and the rhetoricians and dramatists of the fifth century, made various critical remarks—that poetry is charming, that poetry is instructive, that it comes natural to a genius, that it has to be learned by art, that it is like painting, that it consists in a clever use of words—and to these opinions we shall here and there have occasion to allude in retrospect.

In Athens towards the close of the fifth century, after the great Periclean age, the comic dramatists, who made satirical criticism of life in general their business, had some sharp things to say about literature. Especially Aristophanes, and his special literary target was the modernist tragic dramatist Euripides. The earliest piece of extended literary criticism which survives from classical antiquity is an agon or debate in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes (405 B.C.), where Dionysus, patron and god of the theater festivals, has descended into Hades for the purpose of bringing back to earth the recently departed Euripides, but in the end actually makes the award to the good old-fashioned writer Aeschylus. The announced standards of criticism are "skill in the art" and "wise counsel for the state." The latter of these is perhaps the more important, but the actual decision of Dionysus seems to rest not so much on an appeal to either standard as on the fact that Aeschylus is the poet who takes his fancy. Some specific poetic traits are amusingly criticized—the wild and whirling magniloquence of Aeschylus (his "hippalectors" [1] and "tragelaphs" [2]), the sentimental fondness of Euripides for lame beggars as heroes. But the thing that a critically inclined person may remember most vividly is a certain directness in the form of argument. Scales are brought out, and the poets are weighed against each other line for line.

DIONYSUS: Now, then, each repeat a verse.
EURIPIDES: "I wish that Argo with her woven wings."
AESCHYLUS: "O streams of Spercheius, and ye pastured plains."
DIONYSUS: Let go!—See now—this scale outweighs that other. Very considerably.

—lines 1381–5 [3]

Although this is a parody of critical procedure, one might take it as a symbol of what is often most refreshing in early critical documents—a certain frontal naiveté, an immediate shrewdness of inquiry which the inheritors of criticism have long since, and by necessity, obscured in their more sophisticated formulations. To be able to speak about

[1] Horse-cocks, gryphons.
[2] Goat-stags, fantastic animals such as were known on Eastern carpets.
[3] Translation of J. Hookham Frere.

Homer's epics, not as the remote and venerable source of a classical tradition 3,000 years old, but as heroic poetry currently recited at popular festivals, and to be able to speak about tragedy and comedy as social and religious forms of art which had developed only within a preceding half century of Athenian prosperity—these were great advantages to the free-lance speculator on general problems of human existence who is the central figure in the next critical work which we are to consider.

II

PLATO's *Ion* was written sometime in the first decade of the fourth century, a few years later than the death of his master Socrates in 399. Like the agon in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes, this piece of criticism takes the dramatic form. It is a philosophic dialogue, the scene being at Athens a short time before the close of the Peloponnesian war and the temporary eclipse of Athenian democracy. The interlocutors are Socrates and the rhapsode Ion, the latter just returned from Epidaurus, where he has won first prize at a festival in honor of Asclepius. A rhapsode (as we conceive him, and indeed largely on the evidence of this dialogue) was a person who might be described, in terms of our own culture, as a sort of combined actor and college teacher of literature. He gave public recitations from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, especially of the more exciting passages; and he undertook to deliver critical and moral lectures. He must have drawn large audiences (even if we take the 20,000 mentioned in the dialogue as a great exaggeration), and he sometimes succeeded in moving these audiences very deeply, even to tears. He appeared in rich attire, perhaps wearing a golden crown, and he received a handsome pecuniary reward. He is representative of the older, literary, and unsystematic Greek education (*paideia*).

Socrates as he confronts Ion in this dialogue may be taken as representing a spirit of criticism which was increasing with the sad experiences of the city state. A mere sophist in the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, as he appears in his *phrontistērion* or "thinkery," corrupting a youth to turn against his father, Socrates is transformed into a subtle philosopher and relentless enemy of ignorance as he appears in the dialogues of Plato. In a friendly and restrained yet insistent way, Socrates, as if seeking to know something of our literary professor's trade secrets, succeeds in asking him some uncomfortable questions and in eliciting some unfortunate answers. Ion admits, for instance, that although there are many poets, and although they speak often on the same topics, he himself is skilled only in reading Homer, and he is interested only in Homer. He drops off into a doze when somebody talks about any other poet. Enough comes out to make it appear that anything Ion has to say about Homer

is scarcely said with the help of what Socrates would call art and knowledge (*technē kai epistēmē*). Ion has no rational technique, for a technique or art is a unified thing (*holon*). Or, as we might say, the term "poetry" if it means anything intelligible is a univocal term, not a quibble. Anybody who can criticize one poet ought to be able to criticize another.[4]

A general tendency of the Socratic argument to thrust at the poet himself through his punier representative the rhapsode[5] culminates midway of the dialogue in a celebrated speech which likens the poet to a magnet radiating a kind of divine power (*theia dunamis*) out through a chain of iron rings, the rhapsode and his audience. Both poets and rhapsodes utter what they do by a divine dispensation, a form of madness.

> For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and unable to utter his oracles.—534[6]

This passage has, during later centuries, sometimes been used for the purpose of invoking Plato as a witness in the cause of poetry. Shelley, for instance, translated the *Ion* and in his own *Defense of Poetry* echoed this passage. Yet it is perhaps worth noting that Ion himself is reluctant to accept this version of his talents.

> That is good, Socrates; and yet I doubt whether you will ever have eloquence enough to persuade me that I praise Homer only when I am mad and possessed; and if you could hear me speak of him I am sure you would never think this to be the case.—536

And in fact the heavy reiteration by Socrates of the idea that the poet is out of his mind or senses—not acting by art, not his own master—does not seem an unequivocal compliment. One might easily come away with the impression that this is a lame alternative to the rational explanations

[4] At the end of Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates, having outlasted all the other guests in an all-night drinking party, is seated, as dawn breaks, with the tragic poet Agathon on one hand and the comic poet Aristophanes on the other, forcing them to admit, drowsily, that since poetry is *one* art, a comic poet should be able to write tragedies, and a tragic poet comedies. Despite literal interpretation by the Platonists, this looks like an ironic counterpart of the argument from fact to theory in the *Ion*. In the *Symposium*, Socrates, starting with a theory, urges it against the well-known contrary fact: that poets do *not* work by a scientific technique.

[5] Craig LaDrière, "The Problem of Plato's Ion," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, X (September, 1951), 26–34, elaborates the view that the dialogue is aimed not at poetry itself but only at the art of criticism.

[6] Quotations from Plato's *Dialogues* in this chapter are in the translation of Benjamin Jowett, the third edition, revised, first published in 1892. The Fourth Edition of the *Dialogues*, revised by order of the Jowett Copyright Trustees, 4 vols., Oxford, 1953, does not make substantial changes in any of the passages which we quote.

which Socrates has apparently tried so hard to elicit. A second series of questions, leading to the conclusion of the dialogue, is not calculated to minimize such an impression.

SOCRATES: Then which will be a better judge of the lines which you were reciting from Homer, you or the charioteer?

ION: The charioteer.

SOCRATES: Why, yes, because you are a rhapsode and not a charioteer.

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: And the art of the rhapsode is different from that of the charioteer?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if a different knowledge, then a knowledge of different matters?

ION: True.

SOCRATES: You know the passage in which Hecamede, the concubine of Nestor, is described as giving to the wounded Machaon a posset, as he says,

> "Made with Pramnian wine; and she grated cheese of goat's milk with a grater of bronze, and at his side placed an onion which gives a relish to drink." [*Iliad* XI, 639–40]

Now would you say that the art of the rhapsode or the art of medicine was better able to judge of the propriety of these lines?

ION: The art of medicine.—538

Socrates drives the inquiry along for some time in this manner, obtaining admissions about the rhapsode's incompetence in one art after another, until at length he is in a good position to raise the question whether any art at all remains the peculiar possession of the rhapsode himself.

SOCRATES: . . . Do you, who know Homer so much better than I do, Ion, select for me passages which relate to the rhapsode and the rhapsode's art, and which the rhapsode ought to examine and judge of better than other men.

ION: All passages, I should say, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Not all, Ion, surely. Have you already forgotten what you were saying? A rhapsode ought to have a better memory.

ION: Why, what am I forgetting?

SOCRATES: Do you not remember that you declared the art of the rhapsode to be different from the art of the charioteer?

ION: Yes, I remember.

SOCRATES: And you admitted that being different they would have different subjects of knowledge?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then upon your own showing the rhapsode, and the art of the rhapsode, will not know everything?

ION: I should exclude certain things, Socrates.

SOCRATES: You mean to say that you would exclude pretty much the subjects of the other arts. As he does not know all of them, which of them will he know?

ION: He will know what a man and what a woman ought to say, and what a freeman and what a slave ought to say, and what a ruler and what a subject.

SOCRATES: Do you mean that a rhapsode will know better than the pilot what the ruler of a sea-tossed vessel ought to say?—539–40

So the argument swings back to where it was before. We observe that a momentary attempt by Ion to move into an area which we might call something like "general human nature" is quickly checked by Socrates with a question which insists on the technical or scientific. At the conclusion of the dialogue Ion is reduced to the comic position of maintaining that his being a rhapsode implies at least that he would be also a good general—perhaps because, as Plato explains in Book X of the *Republic*, the reading of Homer was traditionally supposed to have something to do with the art of warfare.

In the starkest and least reducible sense the questions put to Ion amount to these: What does poetry tell us? What is the source of the poet's power? And, though this is left more obscurely implicit: What is the relation between the poet's source and the nature of what he actually says? At the beginning of his *Theogony* the poet Hesiod had qualified the traditional appeal to the Muses with a voucher for their veracity. The Muses had actually appeared to him and said:

> Many feigned things (*pseudea*) like to the truth we know how to tell; yet we know how, when we are willing, to tell what is true.—*Theogony*, 27 ff.[7]

By a kind of joke or sleight of argument Socrates combines a partly negative answer (poetry and rhapsody—in their own right and as such

[7] Cf. W. C. Greene, "The Greek Criticism of Poetry, a Reconsideration," in *Perspectives of Criticism*, ed. Harry Levin (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p. 21.

—do not tell us anything scientific) with a positive answer about the divine origin of poetry and rhapsody. One of the traditionally respectable accounts of poetry (Not only had Homer and the other poets invoked the Muses, but Pindar, for instance, had maintained that poetry proceeds from genius, *phua*, rather than art, *techmē*) is put in such a context as to suggest a certain emptiness. Either Ion has been teasing, Socrates implies, and deceitfully refusing to reveal his rationally understood professional secrets, or else there is nothing rational for him to reveal. He is either dishonest or divinely mad. The cross-examination has carefully kept out of sight whatever may be the rhapsode's type of actual professional discourse, the external manifestation of his "madness" —though from the start Ion has been eager to give an exhibition of that. Overlooking a degree of unfairness in the procedure of Socrates, we may say that we are invited by this dialogue to consider at least two principles which are not on the face of the matter absurd: 1. Being able to compose poetry is not the same as being able to give a rationale of it; 2. poetry is not concerned with making scientific statements.

III

It is possible to point out places in the dialogues of Plato where he seems to treat poetic inspiration very respectfully. In the *Meno* (98–99), for instance, a useful kind of "right opinion" (rather than "knowledge") is conceded to statesmen, interpreters of oracles, seers, and "all poetic persons"—and all these are divinely inspired. And in the *Phaedrus*, although poets rank only sixth in a hierarchy of the elite (248), and although the chief aim of the dialogue is to assert the philosophic or dialectical responsibility of rhetoricians, there is more than one hint that a philosopher is the better for a dash of madness. As for the poet, the *Phaedrus* contains a very strong statement of his dependence on divine madness—in a passage (245) which may be looked on as reversing the ironic emphasis of the parallel passage in the *Ion*.[8] But a history of arguments about poetry will have to claim some license to look rather for ideas in full bloom than for the person behind the ideas. It is another kind of job to try to harmonize all the statements in the dialogues of Plato.

After the *Ion*, the place where we find Plato's mistrust of poetry

[8] See R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford, 1938), pp. 46–7, for a good instance of the argument that Plato was really a friend of the arts. We proceed here on the assumption that the student of poetry need not be really much concerned to enlist Plato on the side of poetry, nor much discomfited to believe that on the whole Plato disapproved of poetry. Plato may conveniently be taken as the representative of an impressive and fairly coherent system of anti-poetic. From early times, the attack upon poetry has often enough been made in his name.

expressed in the simplest and most practical terms is the passage on the "musical" education of the "Guardians" in Books II and III of the *Republic*, a work, be it remembered, of Plato's mid-career and maturity. Here, and again in Book X of the *Republic*, in a more metaphysical context, and in the *Laws*, the compromise *Republic* of Plato's old age, we encounter his well-known objection to the moral effects of poetry. Poetry "feeds and waters the passions," creating division and unsteadiness in the heart, or frivolous laughter, and producing the opposite of civic virtue. The Guardians of the Republic will in fact have the duty of showing poets the gate.

> And therefore when any one of these pantomimic gentlemen . . comes to us, and makes a proposal to exhibit himself and his poetry, we will fall down and worship him as a sweet and holy and wonderful being; but we must also inform him that in our State such as he are not permitted to exist; the law will not allow them. And so when we have anointed him with myrrh, and set a garland of wool upon his head, we shall send him away to another city. For we mean to employ for our souls' health the rougher and severer poet or story-teller, who will imitate the style of the virtuous only, and will follow those models which we prescribed at first when we began the education of our soldiers.—III, 398

A passage of similar tenor in the *Laws* speaks of an ideal, civic-minded poet, a man "more than fifty years old," a safe one for composing patriotic songs. But such a one was not to be found among the actual poets—Homer, the tragedians, the writers of comedy.

> We are ready to acknowledge that Homer is the greatest of poets and first of tragedy writers; but we must remain firm in our conviction that hymns to the gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry which ought to be admitted into our State. For if you go beyond this and allow the honeyed muse to enter, either in epic or lyric verse, not law and the reason of mankind, which by common consent have ever been deemed best, but pleasure and pain will be the rulers in our State. . . . But that she may not impute to us any harshness or want of politeness, let us tell her that there is an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry.—*Republic* X, 607

The quarrel between the poet and the philosopher is the deep end of the quarrel between the poet and the moralist. If poetry produces immoral results, this happens not without certain causes in the nature of poetry itself—one of these, for instance, is the very fact that poetry deals with a variety of motives and feelings, the good and the bad, pleas-

ure and pain. In Books II and III of the *Republic* it appears that poetry is engaged in fictions—often, moreover, in wicked fictions—wicked lies. Homer and Hesiod and the dramatists, instead of representing God as good and the source of all good (instead of telling the truth about which Hesiod's Muses boasted), give us an anthropomorphic, wrangling, deceitful, and revengeful crowd of deities. These poets show heroes as emotional and cowardly, wicked men as prosperous, and just men as wretched. Earlier exegetes, forsooth, had invented a pretty way of defending these impieties by saying that they were "allegorical." They were supposed to conceal an acceptable message at a more abstract level.

At this stage of the argument appears the incidental concept of "imitation" (*mimēsis*)—which, with a certain modification, becomes in later passages the center of Plato's poetics. Certain poems, he observes in Book III, simply tell what happened; others actually imitate what happened—dramas, of course—and these are the most dangerous ones, because the most contagious. A man who is to play a serious part in life cannot afford to imitate any other kind of part. (Let the slaves and hired strangers, he says in *Laws* VII, 817, act our comedies for us.) It is needless to try to guess how consciously Plato's view had developed by the time he wrote his second discussion of poetry in the *Republic*, that of Book X (it was written perhaps some years after Books II and III). In any case the concept of imitation[9] has now become markedly more pejorative and is furthermore now applied to poetry as if it were inseparable.

> Speaking in confidence, for I should not like to have my words repeated to the tragedians and the rest of the imitative tribe—but I do not mind saying to you, that all poetical imitations are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers, and that the knowledge of their true nature is the only antidote to them.—595

The reasoning is made clearer in a very explicit analogy between a poet and an illusionist painter of a bed.

> And the painter too is, as I conceive. . . . a creator of appearances, is he not?
>
> Of course.
>
> But then I suppose you will say that what he creates is untrue. And yet there is a sense in which the painter also creates a bed?
>
> Yes, he said, but not a real bed.

[9] Richard McKeon's exposition of the analogical series of meanings enjoyed by the term *mimēsis* in Plato's works ("Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity", MP, XXXIV, August, 1936, 1–35) tends to soften the application of the term to poetry in these contexts, but the pejorative implications can scarcely be dismissed.

And what of the maker of the bed? were you not saying that he too makes, not the idea which, according to our view, is the essence of the bed, but only a particular bed?

Yes, I did.

Then if he does not make that which exists he cannot make true existence, but only some semblance of existence; and if any one were to say that the work of the maker of the bed, or of any other workman, has real existence, he could hardly be supposed to be speaking the truth.

Beds, then, are of three kinds, and there are three artists who superintend them: God, the maker of the bed, and the painter?

Yes, there are three of them.

God, whether from choice or from necessity, made one bed in nature and one only; two or more such ideal beds neither ever have been nor ever will be made by God.

And what shall we say of the carpenter—is he not also the maker of the bed?

Yes.

But would you call the painter a creator and maker?

Certainly not.

Yet if he is not the maker, what is he in relation to the bed?

I think, he said, that we may fairly designate him as the imitator of that which the others make.

Good, I said; then you call him who is second [1] in the descent from nature an imitator?

Certainly, he said.

And the tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is twice removed from the king and from the truth?

That appears to be so.—596–7

With the allusion to the ideal bed, the work of God, we are involved in the Platonic metaphysics of transcendental reality, a system of ideas which needs to be clarified by reference to two passages which inter-

[1] The words in Plato's text are actually "third" and "thrice," but their meaning depends on the classical or inclusive method of counting.

vene in the *Republic* between the discussion of poetry in Books II–III and that in Book X. One is the allegory in Book VII of the cinematic cave in which men sitting on a bench with their backs to an opening and a great fire beyond, see only the shadows of a sort of passing puppet show cast on the wall before them. Such is our own experience of what we think to be reality. The other passage is the more technically instructive figure of the "line," in Book VI, with its four ascending phases of knowledge: the lowest *eikasia*, or sensory imaging (of the surface of things and their shadows—the aspects of the bed which can be painted); the second, *pistis* (faith), a kind of trustful apprehension of the solid yet mutable things of our world (beds and horses); the third, on the upper side of a major central division, *dianoia*, discursive understanding of mathematicals or geometric figures; and at the top, *noēsis*, intuitive and true knowledge of permanent beings, the forms or ideas (*eidē*).[2] For the moment let us not attempt to say more precisely what these last are.

IV

PLATO's doctrine of ideas is perhaps most often known in its rather vague relation to the "beautiful" (*to kalon*) and to love (*erōs*), and in this relation chiefly through three other dialogues, the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. In the first of these, the conversation on immortality held by Socrates with his friends on the day he is to drink the hemlock, we find the doctrine of *anamnēsis*[3] (Wordsworthian otherworldly recollection) as an explanation of how we come to be possessed at all of ideas more perfect than the things of our worldly experience. As for beautiful things, they are indeed beautiful "by reason of beauty"—that is, by participating in the beautiful—but beauty is named only as one among other kinds of perfection (75a–d; 100c–e). The discourse is ascetic rather than aesthetic, stressing preparation for immortality by philosophic discipline. But in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, the preparation, or approach, is that of the lover, by way of mortal beauty. The lover graduates, in the *Symposium* (210–12), from single beautiful bodies to all beautiful bodies, from bodies to forms, and from forms to practices and notions, until he contemplates "the vast sea of beauty"; and in the *Phaedrus* (249, 265–6, 277), he graduates from bodily beauty not only to ideal beauty but to "wisdom, goodness, and the like," all the hierarchy of ideas. The lover becomes in effect the philosopher.

[2] Both *dianoia* and *noēsis* come under the generic head of *epistēmē* (knowledge), what Socrates found wanting in Homer and Ion. Both *eikasia* (the awareness of images, *eikones*) and *pistis* come under the generic head of *doxa* (mere opinion) and both refer to the world of becoming, *ta gignomena*.

[3] See too the *Meno*, 82–5, where Socrates elicits geometrical reasoning from a slave boy.

An honest reading of these and other passages in Plato can scarcely blink the fact that the bodily beauty alluded to is that of the boy lover. (*Orthōs paiderastein* reads one phrase of the *Symposium*, 211, rendered by an eminent Victorian translator as "true love.") Pederasty was a Spartan cult, supposed to induce military virtue, and, as the first two speeches of the *Symposium* and the temptation of Socrates described in the same dialogue by Alcibiades make sufficiently clear, it had a vogue among Athenian intellectuals during Plato's boyhood. "Love is of generation," says the *Symposium* (206), "of birth in beauty." "Souls which are pregnant conceive wisdom and virtue" (209). The beautiful notions begotten through this love make a clear enough contrast to the results of heterosexual love.[4] Without wholly endorsing the charge of one writer on this theme,[5] that these dialogues have been the "sulphurous breviary" of homosexual literary cults in all succeeding ages, we incline to say that the general warmth and color of the dialogues, the brilliant use of allegorical imagery like that of the soul as charioteer and the higher and lower passions as his pair of horses in the *Phaedrus*, and the vivacious drama of the conversationalists at the banquet—Aristophanes, Agathon, Alcibiades, Socrates—on the attractive theme of love, have helped a great deal to make the aspect of Platonism that relates to "love" and "beauty" best known and best liked among literary students during every Renaissance. Yet these topics have furnished not so much a workable theory about the nature of poetry as inspirational subject matter for literary treatment—the "Idees on hie . . . which Plato so admyred" in Spenser's *Hymne of Heavenly Beautie* or the conception of Platonic pure love in the Fourth Book of Castiglione's *Courtier*.

The term "beauty" (*to kalon*) is used in the Platonic dialogues to refer rather loosely to a wide range of natural objects, artifacts, institutions, and ideas. In the *Philebus* (64e) we have the relatively helpful concept of beauty as measure and proportion (*metriotēs kai summetria*) and the distinction (51c) between the beautiful in itself and the relatively beautiful. In the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon (III, 8; IV, 6) Socrates produces the concept of the beautiful as the convenient (i.e. the "functional"—a dung basket, if well made, is beautiful; a golden shield, if not well made, is ugly). And the dubiously Platonic *Greater Hippias* presents him in his most sustained effort to face the difficult problem. He disposes easily of such too concrete suggestions by the sophist as that a beautiful horse or a beautiful maiden may be adduced to define the

[4] In the *Phaedo*, as Socrates prepares for the draught of hemlock, the women of his family are admitted to see him, but briefly and grudgingly toward the close of the day.

[5] John Jay Chapman, *Lucian, Plato, and Greek Morals* (Boston, 1931), p. 133. Cf. the more sober account by Warner Fite, *The Platonic Legend* (New York, 1934), Chap. VIII, "Platonic Love." Plato censures this kind of *eros* in *Republic* III, 403 and *Laws*, 636.

concept of the beautiful (*parthenos kalē kalon*), or that whatever is gold is beautiful. (What about the chryselephantine statue of Athena? says Socrates. Why didn't Phidias make it all gold?) Canvassing the problems of the convenient, the appropriate, and the useful—in fact, the whole difficult problem of terminal and instrumental values—he arrives at the tentative (and far from ridiculous) conclusion that the beautiful may be that which is beneficially pleasurable (*hēdonēn ōphelimon*) through the senses of sight and hearing (303E). But the idea of the "beneficial" persists in betraying the instrumentalism of the concept. The conclusion is that the discourse has been useless. And even these efforts at definition are not very precisely reflected in the *Symposium* or in the other classic places where Plato discusses beauty and love.

V

Let us turn back, toward a colder side of Plato's theory of ideas which we have already hinted. The presence of the hypothetical *mathēmatika*, the geometric forms, at the third level of the scale of knowledge in Book VI of the *Republic* might lead one to wonder whether any more purified element of the mathematical is implicit in the highest level, that of the pure forms. A pronounced attention to mathematics and geometry as one stage of the Guardian's education, in Book V of the *Republic*, might suggest the same speculation. Students of the Platonic text and of other evidence about Plato's thought, especially the criticisms of Aristotle, do in fact distinguish two strains in his theory of ideas. One is the Socratic or logical, the argument that our use of general terms and class conceptions entails the existence of real and transcendent unities corresponding to these conceptions. It is an argument which receives heavy criticism, apparently from Plato himself, in the *Parmenides* and other late dialogues. The second is a more subtle ontological attempt to get at the permanent and necessary structure of reality, a development of Pythagorean number theory in which Plato distinguishes between the continuous and boundless stuff of our sensory experience, the indeterminate world of becoming, and a real or rational world of limit, that is, of *ratios* between both unit numbers and geometric lines. The word for the rational principle is *logos*—the same word that appears in the crucial definition of geometric ratio in the Fifth Book of Euclid. At the level of *mathematicals* or geometric figures, one may have, let us say, a multiplicity of isosceles triangles, all of different sizes and hence participating in the diversity and indefiniteness of material extension. The final oneness, or what they have in common, is their ratio, something intelligible though unimaginable. As Aristotle was to put it:

> Further, besides sensible things and Forms he says there are the objects of mathematics, which occupy an intermediate position, differing from sensible things in being eternal and unchangeable, from Forms in that there are many alike, while the Form itself is in each case unique.—*Metaphysics* I (A), 6.[6]

What may be difficult for us to conceive is that the theory posits such a number or ratio as the real idea behind each of the ordinary and immediately concrete names which we give to objects. As a modern interpreter has put it:

> The idea of man is not the general term which designates all perceived men. The idea of myself is not what I sense when I consider myself introspectively. The idea of fire is not the general term (or any notion in the mind of which the general term is a symbol) referring to all cases of perceived fire. Nor is the idea of fire that notion given by a definition which distinguishes fire from all other factors in the universe, in terms of perceived properties. All the so-called concepts which we use in ordinary discourse, and which most modern philosophers have in mind when they refer to Plato's theory of ideas,—all such notions are not ideas, in the Platonic meaning of the term. They are merely nominalistic terms referring to factors in "the class of the mixed." Ideas are purely in the class of the limit and they cannot be illustrated by pointing to anything immediately sensed. . . . "ideas," whether they be the idea of the fire, the idea of myself, or the idea of the good, are ratios which only an analytical mathematical symbolism can express and only the pure scientific intellect can grasp.[7]

Perhaps the most easily grasped evidence that Plato really thought this way is to be found in his late cosmological dialogue the *Timaeus*, (53–6), where, taking advantage of the fact that there are five, and only five, kinds of regular polyhedra, he assigns a basic structure, the real idea, to each of what were then supposed to be the four primary elements: fire, earth, air, water, and to a fifth imagined element, "ether." Fire, as we might guess from its volatility and sharpness, has for its mathematical the regular pyramid or tetrahedron, and for its "idea" the ratio of magnitudes which defines the tetrahedron. Earth, as the most solid and least movable element, has the cube or hexahedron; and so forth with perhaps less plausibility, according to the lightness and number of faces of the octahedron (air), the icosahedron (water), and the

[6] See *post* Chapter 2, p. 22, n. 1.

[7] F. S. C. Northrop, "The Mathematical Background and Content of Greek Philosophy," in *Philosophical Essays for Alfred North Whitehead* (New York, 1936), pp. 32–3. By permission of Longmans, Green & Co., Inc.

dodecahedron (ether).[8] Until very recent times the five regular solids were known as the Platonic bodies. The better part of the soul, Plato said in *Republic X* (602), trusts to measure and calculation. He is said to have inscribed over the entrance to his school: "Let no one ignorant of geometry enter" (*Ageōmetrētos mēdeis eisitō*).[9]

One will be perhaps likely to think that this side of Plato's theory, hyperintellectual and even frigid, must have seemed even to him far less relevant to the nature of literature than the more visionary conceptions which we have described somewhat earlier. It is possible, however, that through another group of arts which were highly cultivated in Greece during Plato's time—the visual—at least a remote kind of relevance may be inferred. One of Plato's later dialogues, the *Philebus*, is a discussion of pleasure and knowledge in which he attempts for one thing to distinguish what he calls mixed pleasures (those that follow on pain or are somehow dependent on it—and here he puts the pleasures of tragedy and comedy) from certain kinds which he considers more pure and hence more nearly related to the good. One passage of this dialogue has often been produced in our day as a charter from antiquity for theorists of "significant form" in the visual arts.

> I do not mean by beauty of form such beauty as that of animals or pictures, which the many would suppose to be my meaning; but, says the argument, understand me to mean straight lines and circles, and the plane or solid figures which are formed out of them by turning-lathes and rulers and measures of angles; for these I affirm to be not only relatively beautiful, like other things, but they are eternally and absolutely beautiful, and they have peculiar pleasures, quite unlike the pleasures of scratching. And there are colours which are of the same character, and have similar pleasures.—51[1]

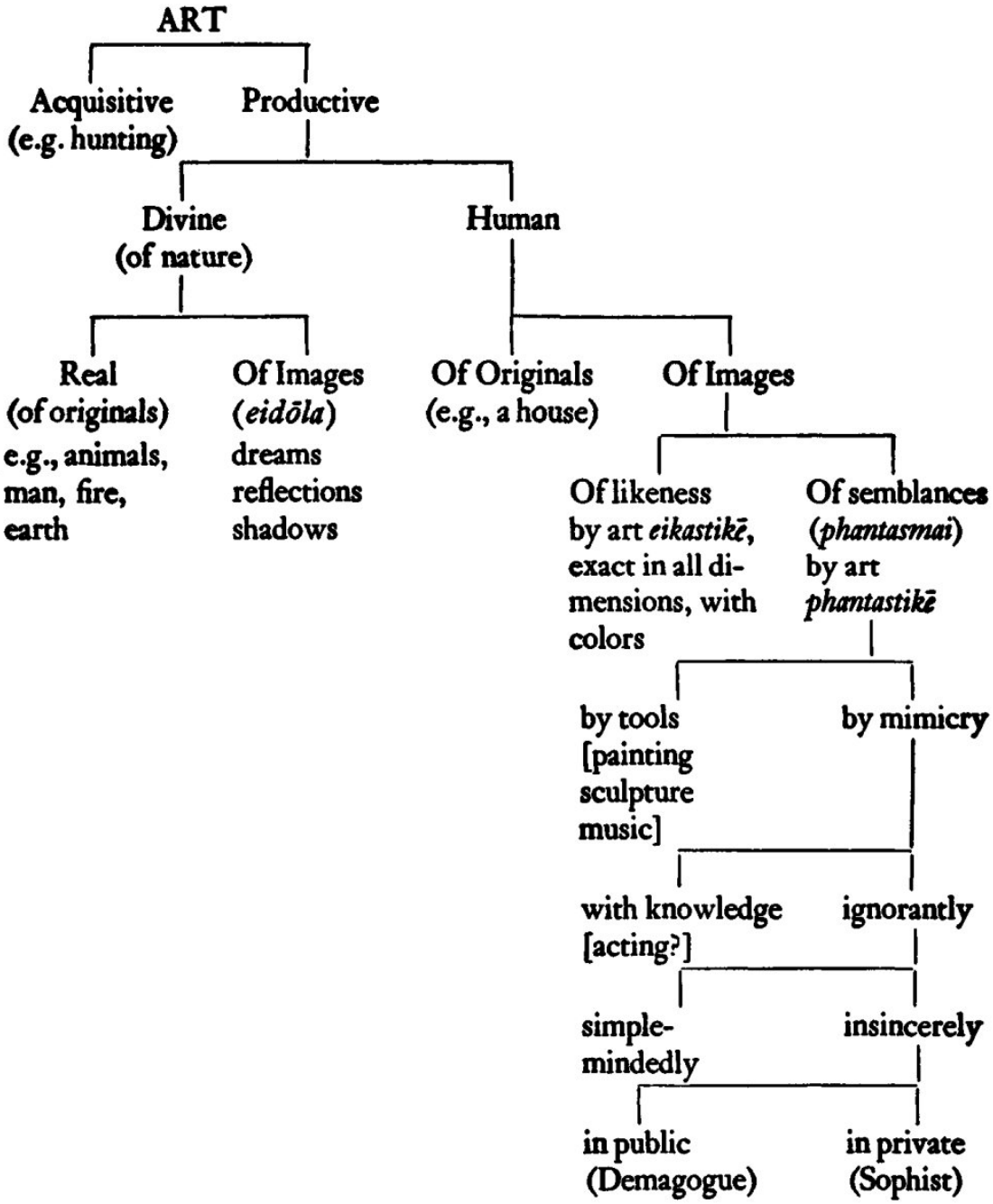
Let us place in conjunction with this a tabular view of the imitative arts digested from several places in another late dialogue, the *Sophist* (219, 235, 264, 266). The sophist himself, viewed by Plato as a special kind of

[8] *Timaeus*, 53c–56c. Francis M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology, The Timaeus of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary* (London, 1937), pp. 210–22. The assignment of the dodecahedron to ether is not explicit in Plato but was apparently made so in early Platonic commentary. See the quotation from Plutarch's *On the E at Delphi* (XI) in Cornford, p. 220; Paul Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago, 1933), p. 408; *Epinomis* 981, 984.

[9] Adolph Busse, ed., *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, XVIII (Berlin, 1900), 118, the commentary of Elias. Cf. Aristotle: "Mathematics has been turned by our present day thinkers into the whole of philosophy" (*Metaphysics*, I, 9).

[1] Cf. E. F. Carritt, in *Philosophies of Beauty* (Oxford, 1931), pp. 29–30; Herbert Read, *Art Now* (New York, 1933), p. 101; R. H. Wilenski, *The Meaning of Modern Sculpture* (London, 1933).

imitator or deceiver, is the object of definition, but some incidental light is cast in another direction.



The part of the table which specially concerns us is the division between eikastic (or realistic) images and phantastic (or imaginative). Here Plato seems to be attempting to deal, though perhaps not very decisively, with a question which is prominent in ancient theory of art, that of illusion. There is a passage in the *Iliad* of Homer—often quoted by historians of literary theory—where the shield made by Hephaestus for Achilles is described with great admiration—the images with which it was adorned were so life-like that the furrows of a ploughed field, though wrought

from the gold, seemed black. During the lifetime of Plato himself Greek visual art seems to have been moving rapidly in the direction of naturalism and illusionism. Art historians of the formalist school like to tell us that even the Great Period of Greek sculpture (that of the pediments of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, for instance, or the Periclean Parthenon at Athens) is a degeneration from a more formal (and Egyptian) antiquity. Visual art was already tending toward the Rogers-ware style of Hellenistic narrative and genre sculpture (the dying Gaul, the old market woman). Later documents of antiquity, especially the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder, record such instances of illusionist virtuosity in Plato's day as that of Zeuxis, who painted grapes so well that they attracted birds,[2] or that of Parrhasius, who painted drapery that appeared to move. These achievements seem to have arisen out of one of the chief developments during the fifth century in theatrical design, that of *skiagraphia* (shaded painting) or perspective scenery. At the same time the formal and geometrical element of visual art continued very prominently in the architecture by which Plato was surrounded. Modern investigation has fairly well demonstrated that the art of Greek vases and temple architecture was based on the principle of "dynamic symmetry"—the commensurability of area rather than of line and above all the commensurability generated by extreme and mean ratio, the "Golden Section." [3]

The relation between illusion and formalism in Plato's day was scarcely simple—as may be instanced even in the "fantastic" art mentioned by Plato in the *Sophist* (235e). Painters and sculptors, he points out, strive for the proportion that will *appear* beautiful. Those who carve colossal figures, for instance, make the upper parts larger so that from the ground they will be seen in usual proportions. A Byzantine Greek chronicler has preserved the story that when Phidias produced his statue of Athena in competition with that of a rival, the people were ready to stone Phidias when the statue was seen lying on the ground.[4] Such proportioned illusion as this Plato classes with the work of the sophist. Yet even the architectural formalism of Plato's day depended on the same adjustments—as in the well-known entasis or swell of the temple columns, in virtue of which they look straight as one sees them from below.

Let us move toward a close of this discussion by placing side by side two more Platonic passages, the first from an early dialogue about verbal images or names, the *Cratylus.*

[2] Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXV, 36, 60: ". . . *uvas pictas tanto successu ut in scaenam aves advolassent.*" See Pierre-Maxime Schuhl, *Platon et L'Art de Son Temps* (Paris, 1933).

[3] Among a number of works on this subject by Jay Hambidge, see especially *Dynamic Symmetry, The Greek Vase* (New Haven, 1920), *The Parthenon and Other Greek Temples, Their Dynamic Symmetry* (New Haven, 1924), *Practical Applications of Dynamic Symmetry* (New Haven, 1932).

[4] Tzetzes, *Historiarum Variarum Chiliades*, VIII, 353–69, ed. T. Kiessling (Lipsiae, 1826), pp. 295–6.

> I should say . . . that the image, if expressing in every point the entire reality, would no longer be an image. Let us suppose the existence of two objects: one of them shall be Cratylus, and the other the image of Cratylus; and we will suppose, further, that some God makes not only a representation such as a painter would make of your outward form and colour, but also creates an inward organization like yours, having the same warmth and softness; and into this infuses motion, and soul, and mind, such as you have, and in a word copies all your qualities, and places them by you in another form; would you say that this was Cratylus and the image of Cratylus, or that there were two Cratyluses?—432

The second, from the attack on poetry in Book X of the *Republic.*

> Then the imitator . . . is a long way off the truth, and can do all things because he lightly touches on a small part of them, and that part an image. For example: A painter will paint a cobbler, carpenter, or any other artist, though he knows nothing of their arts; and, if he is a good artist, he may deceive children or simple persons, when he shows them his picture of a carpenter from a distance, and they will fancy that they are looking at a real carpenter.—598

The minimal conclusion to be drawn from all the evidence would seem to be that Plato has confronted the very difficult problem of the relation between formalism and illusionism in art and, in line with the austerity and subtlety of his basic mathematical view of reality, has expressed his mistrust of the realistic trends of his day and has cast a perennially influential vote in favor of some kind of visual formalism.[5] If this part of his theorizing does not go far in telling us about the nature of poetry, at least it offers a prototype for theories of "stylization" or "detachment" which have never since in the history of poetics been altogether submerged. In what is no doubt its excess of detachment Plato's theory offers an approach by contrast to—as indeed it was historically the point of departure for—the more empirically weighted and warmer theory which we shall encounter in the next chapter.

[5] Plato's formalism seems not to extend to auditory art. See his rules for moral fitness in modes of music, *Republic* III, 398–400, and his censure of "the bare sound of harp and flute," *Laws* II, 669.

CHAPTER 2

ARISTOTLE'S ANSWER: POETRY AS STRUCTURE

§ *Aristotle's* Poetics *in relation to his major works, relation between Plato and Aristotle on universals, the mathematical, the biological,* entelechy, *the Socratic problem of classes—II. theoretical and practical sciences, the* Ethics *and* Politics, *poetry and information, the artistic norm—III. the universal, the probable,* mimēsis, homoiōma, *internal action, music, figures and colors,* opsis, *the ideal* (to beltion, hoia einai dei)*—IV. growth of tragedy, norms of size and order,* peripeteia, anagnorisis, desis, lusis, *wholeness, beginning, middle, end—V. cohesion of causes,* Posterior Analytics, *the logic of the syllogism, dramatic logic,* Oedipus, *organic unity, Aristotle's six elements of tragedy, reality of the poetic object* §

PLATO'S PUPIL ARISTOTLE CAME TO THE ACADEMY IN THE YEAR 367 OR eighteen years before Plato's death at the age of 80 in 349. Fourteen years later, in 335, Aristotle founded his own school the Lyceum. It was apparently towards the end of his career that he produced his treatise in three books on *Rhetoric* and in some way was responsible for an essay or compilation of notes, in twenty-six chapters, the celebrated *Poetics.* Even if it were to happen that at this late date classical scholars changed their opinion about the authorship of the *Poetics,* one would still turn, for the explication of these condensed and partly chaotic hints, to the system of Greek philosophy which most readily connects with them, the major works of Aristotle, especially his *Metaphysics, Ethics,* and *Politics.* The *Poetics* is a work of the type which Aristotelians have called "acroamatic"—to be interpreted only with the help of other and larger works. The difference between Aristotle and Plato on poetry is a fulfilment of their difference on ideas or universals, and the *Rhetoric*

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and *Poetics* are parts of a larger answer to Plato. Plato is a teacher and opponent who often appears, or is often just out of sight, in the arguments of Aristotle, and especially in historical parts of the *Metaphysics.*

> . . . having in his youth first become familiar with . . . the Heraclitean doctrines (that all objects of sense are ever in a state of flux and there is no knowledge about them), Plato held these views even in later years. Socrates, however, was busying himself about ethical matters and neglecting the world of nature . . . he fixed thought for the first time on definitions. Plato accepted his teaching but held that the problem applied not to objects of sense but to entities of another kind—for this reason, that common definitions could not be definitions of any objects of sense, as these are always changing. The "entities of another kind," then, he called Ideas, and objects of sense, he said, were all named after Ideas and in virtue of a relation to these; for the many objects of sense exist by participation in the Ideas that have the same name as they.—*Metaphysics* I (A), 6 [1]

> . . . if the Forms exist and "animal" is present in "man" and "horse," it is either one and the same in number, or different. (In formula it is clearly one, for he who states the formula will go through the same formula in either case.) If then there is a "man-in-himself" who is a "this" and exists apart, the parts also of which he consists, e.g. "animal" and "two-footed," must indicate "thises," and be capable of separate existence and substances.—*Metaphysics* VII (Z), 13

> Again, if the Forms are numbers, how can they be causes? Is it because existing things are other numbers, e.g. one number is man, another is Socrates, another Callias?
>
> —*Metaphysics* I (A), 9

It is perhaps best for our purpose to attempt to express the difference between Plato and Aristotle in their view of universals as broadly and as simply as possible. It derives from the fact that whereas Plato, as we have seen, was mathematical, transcendental, and rigorously abstract, Aristotle (whose father, Nicomachus—if a biographical note be relevant—was court physician to Amyntas II of Macedonia—and who was himself

[1] Works of Aristotle, other than the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, are quoted in this and the following chapter mainly from the Oxford translation, completed in 1931, and largely reprinted in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, Random House, 1941). In the passage from *Metaphysics* I (A), 6 above, the term "sensibles" in the Oxford translation is altered by the present writers to "objects of sense." Some shorter quotations from various Aristotelian works are borrowed from the commentary of S. H. Butcher on the *Poetics*. (Cf. *post*, p. 25, n. 2.)

The Oxford Translation of Aristotle is quoted by permission of the Delegates of The Clarendon Press.

a naturalist and collector of specimens for King Hermias of Atarneus and Assos in Syria) was biological, natural, empirical, and concrete. We shall not go far wrong if we form the habit of imagining behind the universal of Aristotle, rather than a geometric figure like a triangle, some living animal, say a horse. If there was change here, from colthood to death and decay, it was yet possible to say that *something* had changed. (Even if something which is cold becomes hot, a potency has been realized, and potency resides in something.[2]) There is also, especially in a biological object, direction in change, a purpose or *entelechy*, the full self of the object as realized in the object—the horse rather than the colt. "What each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature." [3] Or: ". . . a thing is more properly said to be what it is when it has attained to fulfilment than when it exists potentially." [4] Recurrence in generation also has something to do with it. When a tree is made into a bed, and if the bed then happens to be planted—if anything comes up at all, it will not be a bed but a tree.[5] "Man is born from man, but not bed from bed." The *ousia* or essence, the *eidos* or form, which, as we have seen, was the object of knowledge at the top of Plato's line—but which was apparently transcendental and separate from the horses and beds which are crudely and trustfully known at a lower level by *pistis* (a kind of "animal faith")—is brought down by Aristotle into the things themselves as the dynamic principle of their being which continues through change in a certain direction. The *form* must be in the thing as one of its causes.

> When we are dealing with definite and ordered products of Nature, we must not say that each *is* of a certain quality because it *becomes* so, but rather that they *become* so because they *are* so and so, for the process of becoming attends upon being and is for the sake of being, not *vice versa*.[6]

The Platonic term *ousia* as it appears in Aristotle attracts both "substance" and "essence" for its English translations. The *to ti ēn einai*—the "being what a thing was"—is a relative of *ousia* so close as to be nearly indistinguishable from it. "When we say *what* a thing is, we do not say 'white' or 'hot' or 'three cubits long,' but a 'man' or 'a god.' " [7] Aristotle carries on the Socratic or logical, rather than the Pythagorean or mathematical, strain in Plato's thinking; but he re-enforces this strain ontologically by grounding it more deeply in things themselves, as their vital principle of unity in change. In the *Parmenides* of Plato the younger Socrates, as he is dramatically presented, suffers some embarrassment at

[2] *Metaphysics* IX (Θ); *Physics* I.
[3] *Politics* I, 1.
[4] *Physics* II, 1.
[5] *Physics* II, 1.
[6] *On the Generation of Animals* V, 1.
[7] *Metaphysics* VII (Z), 1.

the questions of the Eleatic Parmenides about the number of things which have *forms*—that is, about the kinds of forms themselves and their number. About some kinds Socrates is sure: there are forms of universal categories such as likeness and difference, of ethical qualities such as justice and goodness, of mathematicals, of elements (fire, air, water, earth), and of natural species, such as man and horse. But about such transitory or inferior classes as, say, mud or hair, the argument is less decided. It is not clear that Aristotle has completely or triumphantly solved this problem. But at least his biological and hence structural emphasis tends to center the concept of form on more complex and stable living things —organic substances. His emphasis falls upon the qualifications which a thing must have in order to be a thing at all, a *this* or a one.[8]

II

THE transition from the more metaphysical areas of Aristotle's thought to his *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* is stepped down or cushioned for us by a distinction again characteristic of the empiricism of Aristotle in reaction against the rational severity of Plato. This is the general distinction which Aristotle makes between theoretical science and a varied range of "practical" philosophies and "productive" arts—or, more briefly, between the demonstrably certain and the arguably probable. The distinction was not pejorative and exclusive, as it tended to be for Plato, but tolerant and inclusive—extending to each kind of discipline a charter to work with the kind of evidence and within the degree of precision which could as a matter of fact be exacted of its peculiar materials. As the ontological and epistemological dialogues of Plato have their themes reflected in the vast museum of his political masterpiece the *Republic*, so the metaphysical, logical and scientific works of Aristotle shade off into his *Ethics*, or philosophy of rational activity along the path of the "mean," and his *Politics*, a more historical inquiry into that activity as it derives from man's role as a member of society. "Man is naturally a social animal" (*Anthrōpos phusei politikon zōon*).[9] Book VIII of the *Politics* deals with education, and more specifically, Chapters 5 and 7 of this Book, with the value of visual, musical, and verbal arts. With the value of poetry, says Aristotle, I have dealt more fully in my *Poetics*. We may think of both his *Poetics* and his *Rhetoric* as expansions of this area of the *Politics* and may safely work on the hypothesis that for Aristotle, as for Plato, poetry is an art to be understood, and praised or blamed, only in its relation to the whole human being of whom it is both the instrument and the reflection.

[8] Cf. *post* Chapter 7, the neo-Platonic development of this conception.
[9] *Politics* I, 1.

Such a basic assumption, however, does not prevent Aristotle from looking at poetry in its own perspective as a thing having its own peculiar character. One of the most interesting passages in the *Poetics*—though it is but an incidental excursion—occurs in Chapter XXV when Aristotle in the course of rejecting several pedantries of criticism apparently prevalent in his day (the reliances, no doubt, of the caviller Zoilus [1] and his friends) alludes to a kind of hyper-literalism, a scientific and informational criterion, such as might easily be imputed to the Socrates of Plato's *Ion*. One may distinguish, says Aristotle, between faults which affect a poem as such and those which do not.

> . . . if the failure is due to a wrong choice—if he has represented a horse as throwing out both of his off legs at once, or introduced technical inaccuracies in medicine, for example, or in any other art—the error is not essential to the poetry.[2]

Or, to shift the example to the sister mimetic art of painting: "Not to know that a hind has no horns is a less serious matter than to paint it inartistically." With the word *inartistically* Aristotle may be thought to have begged the question, and in a sense no doubt he has. In somewhat the same sense all the other poetic theory which we are to consider in this book will do the same—in the sense, that is, that a certain nuclear area of the indefinable will never be reduced by the theory; a scientific or completely analytic definition of poetry has never been achieved. What is *artistically?* What is art? What does an art of words tell us?

III

Among the parts of the *Poetics* which have been most often quoted by later theorists are the dicta that poetry is a more philosophic and more serious thing (*philosophōteron kai spoudaioteron*) than "history," that it deals with the universal (here is the direct retort to Plato) while history deals with particulars, that it cares not for what *has* happened but for

[1] Zoilus, a critic who flourished about 350 B.C., was the author of a work in nine books probably entitled *Homeromastix* (*A Whip for Homer*).

[2] The *Poetics* of Aristotle is quoted in this and the following chapters from the text and for the most part from the translation of S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th Edition, London, 1907. Cf. *ante* p. 22, n. 1. Other editions and English translations which may be very profitably consulted are: *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, trans. Ingram Bywater (Oxford, 1909); Allan H. Gilbert's translation of the text according to Gudeman's edition, 1934, in Gilbert's *Literary Criticism, Plato to Dryden* (New York, 1940); Seymour M. Pitcher, "Aristotle on Poetic Art," *The Journal of General Education*, VII (October, 1952), 56–76; L. J. Potts, *Aristotle on the Art of Fiction* (Cambridge, 1953). The last is a highly accomplished translation which confers perhaps more continuity and readability on Aristotle's notes than any other attempt in English. Butcher's translation is quoted by permission of Macmillan & Company Ltd and St. Martin's Press.

what may happen (ch. IX), and that it prefers impossible probabilities (*adunata eikota*) to improbable possibilities (*dunata apithana*).[3] But how can what is impossible be probable? Probable, plausible, or harmonious, by certain approximate laws of spirit, value and desire, we might say, rather than by rules of physical science and measurement. Or, by certain internal laws set up by a work of art for itself, rather than by laws of scientific external reference.

The main effort of the Aristotelian tradition in criticism has been to reconcile such statements with the fact that one of the central terms in Aristotle's system—as might be expected from his proximity to Plato and his purpose of rebuttal—is the term *imitation* (*mimēsis*). A term which meant for Plato removal from reality and distortion (at least when he applied the term to art) is manipulated by Aristotle to mean something apparently better than reality—though we may have difficulty in understanding this. In more scientific contexts Aristotle seems to conceive the mimetic relation between practical art and nature as one of assistance in a teleological process. "Art imitates nature" (*hē technē mimeitai tēn phusin*). This statement occurs not in the *Poetics* but in the *Meteorology* (IV, 3) and refers to the help given to digestion by cookery.[4] Art gives nature a boost in her seeking of the goal. Again: "Every art and educational discipline aims at filling out what nature leaves undone" (*pasa gar technē kai paideia to prosleipon bouletai tēs phuseōs anaplēroun—Politics* IV [VII], 17). Or again: "Art finishes the job when nature fails, or imitates the missing parts" (*hē technē ta men epitelei ha hē phusis adunatei apergasasthai, ta de mimeitai—Physics* II, 8). To go a little further, art in having aims and working by a plan or idea, parallels the work of nature. Nature makes a horse; an artist makes a bed.[5]

It is not precisely these meanings, however, which explain what is meant by the preliminary statements in the *Poetics* that the several arts such as music, dancing, painting, and poetry are all *imitative*. In the end one may decide to try for a synthesis of meanings, but primarily the term *mimēsis* in the *Poetics* must be taken as referring not to some kind of aid or parallel to nature but to the making of a likeness or image of nature. An equivalent term is *homoiōma*, one used instead of *mimēsis* in an important passage of the *Politics* (VIII, 5) which speaks of rhythm and melody as an imitation of passions. From certain allusions to portraiture and to other painting in the *Poetics* one might for a moment suppose that the Aristotelian concept of *mimēsis* was of a very literal and external sort, something like the *technē eikastikē* of Plato in the *Sophist*. On the

[3] Ch. XXIV. Cf. XXV: *pros te gar tēn poiēsin hairetōteron pithanon adunaton ē apithanon kai dunaton.*

[4] In the Socratic argument against verbal art (as we shall see, *post* Chapter 4 p. 63), cookery is not an art at all, but a sophistical knack, the false counterpart of medicine.

[5] Cf. *Metaphysics* VII, 9.

other hand music and dancing too are counted in the *Poetics* (as in the *Politics*) as forms of imitation, and the peculiar object of poetic imitation is said in the *Poetics* to be "men in action," their characters, passions, and deeds or experiences (*ēthē, pathē, praxeis*).[6] Aristotle, in short, means that poetic imitation is an imitation of inner human action. The word *homoiōma* in the *Politics* seems to mean a very full imitation, an embodiment, or a "symbol," as it might be called today, of "anger and gentleness . . . courage and temperance, and all the qualities contrary to these." And it is noteworthy that the objects of no other senses, not even the objects of sight, are thought to share this directly emotive and moral quality. "Figures and colors are not imitations, but signs (*sēmeia*), of moral habits, indications which the body gives of states of feeling." As, for example, when a person blushes or grows pale or grimaces. These remarks in the *Politics* may help to explain why at a few places in the *Poetics* Aristotle alludes to the dramatic element of *opsis* or spectacle in a slighting way,[7] as a matter of machinery and costuming rather than poetry, hardly a matter for criticism. Aristotle's emphasis in the *Poetics* falls very clearly on the imitation *in words* of a sort of objects peculiarly suitable for that sort of imitation—namely, human action, passion, and character.

Again, the possible objects of poetic imitation are said in the *Poetics* to be not only men as they are in real life, but men either better (*beltionas*) or worse than they are (ch. II)—and not only things as they were or are, but things as they ought to be (*hoia einai dei*), or as they are said or thought to be (XXV).

> . . . if it be objected that the description is not true to fact, the poet may perhaps reply,—'But the objects are as they ought to be': just as Sophocles said that he drew men as they ought to be; Euripides, as they are.—XXV

> Again, it may be impossible that there should be men such as Zeuxis painted. 'Yes,' we say, 'but the impossible is the higher thing (*beltion*); for the ideal type must surpass the reality.'
>
> —XXV

The term *beltion* ("better thing" or "higher reality") is a part of Aristotle's general metaphysics of form, growth, direction, or ideal. "Nature," he says in the treatise *On the Parts of Animals* (IV, 10), "makes the best (*to beltiston*) of the materials at her disposal." And in that *On the Generation of Animals* (I, 4): "Nature works either through mechanical necessity (*to anagkaion*) or through a drive toward the ideal (*to beltion*)." But what ideal, we might ask, is presented in the *mimēsis*

[6] *Poetics* I–II. Cf. *Problems* XIX, 27: "Though it has no words, music nevertheless has ethical character."

[7] *Poetics* VI, VII, and XIV.

of poetry? Shall we be able through the conception of the ideal to show how poetry as an image is also an imitation in the sense, earlier defined, of a process auxiliary to nature? Shall we say that poetry (taken in the educational sense of the *Politics*) assists or parallels the forces of man's moral nature by offering images of the ideal? If we do say this, we shall come very close to putting a didactic clause in our definition of poetry —closer than Aristotle himself seems to wish. But to say otherwise may terminate in another embarrassment, that of the circular definition. The expression *hoia einai dei* ("things as they ought to be"), says Butcher in his admirable commentary (p. 151), must be taken not in a moral but simply in an aesthetic sense. And with this he confirms the apparently tautological statement of Aristotle that the only *artistic fault* is to paint the animal *inartistically*.

IV

In a characteristic biological analogy Aristotle sums up the history of tragedy as a genre.

> Tragedy, having passed through many phases, reached its natural form, and there it stopped.[8]

The stages of growth in a single organism, from colt to horse, are paralleled in the history of Greek drama from Dionysiac ritual dithyrambics to the tragedies of Sophocles—after which progress ceases. It is possible for the thinker of historical bent to make too much of the fact that Aristotle was an inductive observer and hence to be too confident in assuming that Aristotle's description *a posteriori* of what had been accomplished in the Greek drama of the fifth century was without any implication of value.

Among the simplest norms one might propose for a play is that it should be of a certain size—not too long, so that the mind cannot entertain it (an animal a mile long could not be seen and so would scarcely be called beautiful), but on the other hand, not too short, so as to preclude certain internal relations. The play must in fact be of a certain *magnitude* (*ti megethos*)—because it must be of a certain structure and proportions. "Beauty depends on magnitude and order" (*to gar kalon en megethei kai taxei estin—Poetics* VII).[9] In a simpler and restrictive sense

[8] *Poetics* IV: *pollas metabolas metabalousa hē tragōdia epausato epei esche tēn autēs phusin.*

[9] Cf. *Politics* VII, 4: "Beauty is realized in number and magnitude. . . . To the size of states there is a limit, as there is to other things, plants, animals, implements. . . . For example a ship which is only a span long will not be a ship at all, nor a ship a quarter of a mile long. . . . In like manner a state when composed of too few is not. . . . self-sufficing; when of too many . . . it is not a state, being almost

the action of a tragedy is not longer than one day (*hupo mian periodon hēliou*).[1] In the positive sense, of structure and magnitude, the action must be large enough to admit a change from evil to good or from good to evil (VII)—and, one might add, large enough to display both good and evil adequately. A "complex" action is better than a simple—"complex" being that which includes a *peripeteia* or sudden turn and, as the mechanism of this turn, an *anagnōrisis* or recognition. It is characteristic of Aristotle's thought that these terms, formal in one respect and linking closely with other more formal terms, are in another respect full of implications about the ideal content of tragedy, and in that connection we shall return to them in our next chapter.

The terms *peripeteia* and *anagnōrisis* and also the terms *desis* (complication), *metabasis* (change of fortune—standing in a generic relation to *peripeteia*), and *lusis* (unravelling or denouement) [2] may be looked on as variously intermediate between the sheerly formal and the contentual. The most purified formal terms which Aristotle uses are perhaps *holos* and *teleios;* the action, he says, must be not only of a certain size but whole and complete.[3] The echo from the *Physics* is quite close.

> For thus we define the whole—that from which nothing is wanting, as a whole man or a whole box. . . . "whole" and "complete" are either quite identical or closely akin. Nothing is complete (*teleion*) which has no end (*telos*); and the end is a limit.
>
> —*Physics* III, 6

The discussion of the whole in the *Poetics* postulates the further formal conceptions of an end (*teleutē*), a beginning (*archē*), and a middle (*meson*). The interdependence of these three formal concepts and that of the *whole* is nicely stated in the *Metaphysics:*

> Of quanta that have a beginning and a middle and an end, those to which the position does not make a difference are called totals, and those to which it does, wholes. V, 26.

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incapable of constitutional government. For who can be the general of such a vast multitude, or who the herald, unless he have the voice of a Stentor." In *Metaphysics* XIII, 3, beauty consists in symmetry, order, and proportion, and is illustrated by the mathematical sciences in a special degree.

[1] *Poetics* V. The phrase in the context refers clearly to internal length (plot) rather than to external length (duration), although a careless variation in meaning of *mēkos* (size) in V, 4, and VII, 6 and a synonymous use of *chronos* (time) for one of the meanings have raised some doubt among the commentators. For the unities of time and place, see also Chapter II, 3.

[2] *Poetics* XVIII. In Chapter XII occurs the more superficial distinction of the quantitative parts of a play: "Prologue, Episode, Exodos, Choric song; the last being divided into Parodos and Stasimon." This is thought by some to be a non-Aristotelian interpolation.

[3] *Poetics* VII.

A beginning, says the *Poetics*, is that which requires nothing to have come before it; a middle is that which naturally follows something and precedes something else; an end is that something else. Abstract as the terms are, almost truistic as they may appear to us, the heirs of the whole Aristotelian tradition, they yet involve a certain richness of meaning, and they even raise a few problems. That which requires nothing to have come before it will of course not be found very patly in a drama. The beginning of any story is likely to concern a man or a family and hence to imply at least such antecedents as ancestors (who may or may not be mentioned in a prologue or retrospective narration).[4] The acceptable sense of the statement that a story must have a beginning would seem to be that the story must start more or less where its antecedents may be taken for granted, that is, where they are generic rather than specifically relevant. And this has a very special meaning with reference to the stock materials of Greek tragedy, the favorite stories of Thebes or the house of Atreus. These indeed, says Aristotle, are usually the best, because they have the advantage of having really happened and so must be at least probable. One may add—for it is an idea which readily follows—that these stories have the advantage of getting off to a fast start. A comic poet of Aristotle's time complained:

> Your tragedian is altogether the most fortunate of poets. First his plot is familiar to the audience before a line is uttered—he need only give a reminder. If I just say "Oedipus," they know all the rest: his father was Laius, his mother, Jocasta, the names of his sons and daughters, what he has done and what will happen to him. . . . We comic playwrights have no such resources.[5]

It was in virtue of such a well-stocked tradition of fabulous fact that Horace could later give his classic advice about beginning with the siege of Troy, not with the birth of Helen and her sister and brothers (*nec gemini ab ovo, in medias res*). Yet the Horatian *in medias res* stands in a curiously oblique relation to Aristotle's *meson*—which is an actual middle of a plot, not a beginning. And the paradox cannot be resolved if the Aristotelian terms are taken with chronologically complete and measured reference to the external world.

V

THE terms *beginning*, *middle*, and *end* emphasize a specially close cohesion of causes. Not everything that happens in the life of one man,

[4] Antecedent events introduced in this way are called by Aristotle *ta exōthen* (externals) and are considered as part of the *desis* (XVIII).

[5] Antiphanes, *Poiēsis*, fr. 191, quoted in Gilbert Norwood, *Greek Comedy* (London, 1931), p. 49.

says Aristotle, can be included in one story. Without attempting to force what is mainly a verbal resemblance to the *major*, *minor*, and *middle* terms of the Aristotelian syllogism, one may yet turn to Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* for an instance of how the logic of deduction or the syllogism relates to inductive, or as one might say, dramatic reasoning.

> Quick wit is a faculty of hitting upon the middle term instantaneously. It would be exemplified by a man who saw that the moon has her bright side always turned towards the sun, and quickly grasped the cause of this, namely that she borrows her light from *him*; or observed somebody in conversation with a man of wealth and divined that he was borrowing money, or that the friendship of these people sprang from a common enmity. In all these instances he has seen the major and minor terms and then grasped the causes, the middle terms.
>
> —*Posterior Analytics* I, 34

Aristotle proceeds to reduce the reasoning about the sun to syllogistic form somewhat as follows:

> The moon is lighted from the sun. (minor premise)
> That which is lighted from the sun has its bright side sunward. (major premise)
> Therefore: The moon has its bright side sunward.

The syllogistic reduction we observe is a reversal of the actual experience and act of learning. It is a reformation of a certain order derived from raw experience. One may draw a parallel: a man looks up at the moon and speculates how it comes to be so and so; a man witnesses the tragedy of Oedipus and speculates on its significance, the reasons why it should be so and so. One difference between the astronomical act of learning and that which takes place in the presence of tragedy will be that in the latter we have what Aristotle considers not the demonstrably certain middle terms of a science but the probable terms of a practical art. From the play we could derive not strictly a "syllogism" but an "enthymeme," a counterpart of the syllogism in the realm of probability.[6] Another difference might be that the more complicated chain of events in a drama would yield not one but several middle terms, so that we should have the kind of chain of suspended syllogisms known as the Aristotelian sorites. Again, as it is characteristic of poetry to refrain from generalizations or from giving away any messages, we might expect not to find the major premise of our syllogism—though on the other hand Greek tragedy might provide an exception in that its choruses and frequent gnomic utterances serve a highly generalizing purpose. At any rate if we find a drama, let us say *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles (a play

[6] Cf. *post* Chapter 4, p. 67, n. 5.

which Aristotle seems to regard as something like his ideal),[7] if we find this a coherent and orderly structure, we shall tend to carry away from it some dominant impression. And this might be reduced or depoetized, with great overemphasis on the element of generalization, somewhat as follows:

> Oedipus commits patricide and incest.
> He who commits patricide and incest is a criminal, brings a curse on his country, and is doomed to punishment.
> Therefore: Oedipus is a criminal, brings a curse on his country, and is doomed to punishment.

The precise interpretation of the play which we embody in our syllogism is not essential to the general theory. The reader may write in his own middle term or terms (corresponding to whatever he infers about the source of illumination in *Oedipus*). The point of emphasis here is the implicitly reasonable or consistent pattern, the inductive and imaginative cohesion of the dramatic parts, beginning, middle, and end, and in turn the smaller parts of these.

The kind of oneness implied not only in Aristotle's general theory of organic form but in his theory of verbal mimesis is the oneness of a thing which has heterogeneous, interacting parts. The concept is illustrated by a striking analogy in the *Politics* (II, 2):

> Is it not obvious that a state may at length attain such a degree of unity as to be no longer a state?—since the nature of a state is to be a plurality, and in tending to greater unity, from being a state, it becomes a family, and from being a family, an individual. . . . Again, the state is not made up only of so many men, but of different kinds of men; for similars do not constitute a state. It is not like a military alliance. The usefulness of the latter depends upon its quantity . . . but the elements out of which a unity is to be formed differ in kind.

"The parts of the action," says the *Poetics* (VIII), "stand together." Aristotle's speculations begin with the observation of life, but they do not end in atomistic analysis. He sees the whole as more than the sum of its parts if only in that it includes the relations among the parts.

To make a final application of these notions to the literary object, let us say that rightly understood Aristotle asks us to distinguish between what is really a verbal object (a unity, a thing, and hence an analogue of substantial being) and what only pretends in certain superficial ways to be so. The unity of the verbal object is one which penetrates to many levels and one which requires the complement of all these

[7] See *Poetics* XI, XIII, XV, XVI, XXIV, XXVI.

levels—as perhaps Aristotle indicates in his list of the six elements of tragedy: *muthos* (plot), *ēthos* (character), *dianoia* (thought)—these, he says, are the "matter";[8] *lexis* (diction), *melos* (song)—*these* are the "medium";[8] *opsis* (spectacle)—this is the "manner."[8] The integration of these six is not a thing to be lightly supposed, nor, for that matter, is the legitimacy of the triple distinction: matter, medium, manner—on these issues we shall have occasion to say more. For the moment we assume that the integration, which we discuss now mainly with reference to plot, will in the fullness of fact include the other five elements. Let us put our stress for the moment upon the unity and reality of the play, as distinct from, but analogous to, that of objects in other areas of our experience.

> A sentence or phrase may form a unity in two ways—either as signifying one thing, or as consisting of several parts linked together. Thus the Iliad is one by the linking together of parts, the definition of man by the unity of the thing signified.
>
> —*Poetics* XX

A passage in the *Metaphysics* (VII, 4) makes it clear, indeed, that the oneness of a thing signified, man, for instance, was for Aristotle a oneness of greater metaphysical dignity than the oneness of verbal composition.

> . . . we have a definition not where we have a word and a formula identical in meaning (for in that case all formulae or sets of words would be definitions; for there will be some name for any set of words whatever, so that even the *Iliad* will be a definition), but where there is a formula of something primary. . . .

Nevertheless, the unity of the verbal composition, "by the linking together of parts," has a worth of its own—quite different from that of the other kind of verbal unity, the more abstract unity of definition or statement. *Oedipus the King* is more than its title, and it is more than a certain number of scenes placed together under one title—just as an actual man is more than his name or his definition, and, within the world of physical substances, is more of a thing than a number of cardboard boxes wrapped together and identified with a label. The *Oedipus* has a far more cohesive actuality and substantiality than, for instance, the entries for a year in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or a chapter of Xenophon's *Anabasis*. It has a great deal more than certain other Greek plays, notably than some by Euripides, a dramatist to whom Aristotle refers

[8] For the relation of these terms to the term "form" as that appears throughout this history, see *post* Chapter 32, Epilogue, pp. 747–8.

with markedly less approval. The *Andromache* of Euripides, for example, falls in half (if not into smaller parts) and might easily be viewed as fragments of at least two unfinished plays stuck together by means of the title and certain other abstract indexes. Its unity is somewhat illusory. *Oedipus*, on the contrary, not only presents a certain unified and significant image of reality, but is itself a form of reality.

CHAPTER 3

ARISTOTLE: TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

§ *The tragic focus, definition of tragedy, catharsis—II. plot and character, spectacle, the ideal tragic hero—III.* hamartia (*three interpretations*), *Aristotelian vs. Socratic ethics, good and bad luck, theological blunders,* Oedipus—*IV.* peripeteia *and* anagnōrisis *as dramatic content—V. definition of comedy, comic catharsis, Old Comedy and New, lampooning vs. general significance, label names, comic types in Aristotle's* Ethics, *Theophrastan* Characters, *the comic universal, tragic and comic* hamartia—*VI. tragic and comic antinomies, importance of Aristotle's answer to Plato, a double concern for the universal, escape from both Thracian and Boeotian theory, Abbé Bremond, mystery vs. criticism* §

WE HAVE BEEN USING THE TERM "TRAGEDY" ALMOST AS IF IT WERE synonymous with "poetry." Aristotle does the same, or at least he devotes a large part of his *Poetics*, Chapters VI–XIX, to talking about tragedy. Not only had tragedy evolved, as we have seen, through several phases to its entelechy or full form, but this same evolution was in a broader sense the evolution of poetry to *its* full form, which was no other than that of tragedy. Epic, which Aristotle treats in the last four chapters of the *Poetics*, had been a phase in the genesis of tragedy, it might be discussed in much the same terms, and—though this seems to have run contrary to the prevailing opinion—it was inferior to tragedy because less concentrated, less ideal. Dithyramb was a more recent ritual approach to tragedy, surviving in lyric and choral parts, which ought to be closely integrated with the action. The philosophy of lyric as such does not appear in the *Poetics*. The didactic is clearly not countenanced —the physics of Empedocles being adduced as an instance of what is

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verse but not poetry. The literary genres as such make a post-Aristotelian chapter of critical history. But it may be observed here that the dominance of one genre or another at different periods of critical history may strongly affect whole systems of criticism and may afford the insights through which they make their most permanent statements. The Aristotelian poetics is the poetics of the drama and especially of tragedy. We now quote the celebrated definition of tragedy from Chapter VI. Tragedy is:

> an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear (*di' eleou kai phobou*) effecting the proper purgation (*katharsis*) of these emotions.

One of the most debated clauses of this definition is the last, concerning catharsis. It will be noted that just as Aristotle is in the main intent on answering Plato in metaphysical terms—putting his poetic "universal" against Plato's imitation of an imitation—so here he has thrown out a brief answer in emotive terms to Plato's argument that poetry inflames the passions and weakens moral fiber. Perhaps Aristotle said more about catharsis in a lost second part of his *Poetics*. In the section of the *Politics* on education there is a parallel statement about the benefit of music in working off emotions of religious frenzy. "When hereafter we treat of poetry," he says, "we will treat the subject with more precision" (*Politics* V [VIII], 7). The exegetes of Aristotelian catharsis have chiefly devoted their efforts to arguing the question whether the term "catharsis" is a medical, Hippocratic metaphor implying the purgation or expulsion of something harmful, the emotions themselves—or is a religious or moral metaphor, implying the purification or aesthetic depersonalization of our usually selfish emotions of pity and fear. (Various intermediate theories, of tempering or moderation, appeared in the late Renaissance, and will claim our attention in a later chapter.) The first or hygienic view, though cruder, appears to be what Aristotle meant—if we may judge from what he says of music in the *Politics* and from the usual syntax of the noun *katharsis* with an objective genitive of the harmful thing purged away (rather than of the other thing purified and retained), as in the phrase of Plato's *Phaedo*, *katharsis tis tōn toioutōn pantōn* (i.e. *hēdonōn kai phobōn*),[1] which may be Aristotle's model.[2] The second or

[1] *Phaedo* 69: "Truth is in fact a kind of purgation of all such [pleasures and fears]."

[2] A third argument may be found in the fact that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (II, 5, 8) speaks of pity and fear as naturally related. This seems to tell against the view (Butcher, p. 265) that these emotions are specially brought together in tragedy so that they may purify each other of sentiment and selfishness.

lustratory view is that adopted by Butcher in his influential essay. It connects more readily with normal modern views about the dignity of the tragic experience and its enlargement of our souls; it is doubtless nearer not only to what most of us would like to say but to the truth. It has at least the advantage of making the enjoyment of tragedy occur while we are witnessing it, rather than in a sounder sleep when we get home, a relief after emotional orgy. But both views concern after all not what tragedy says or what tragedy is so much as what tragedy may do to us; they lie rather in the realm of experimental psychology than in that of literary criticism. They treat "pity and fear" as a reference to something in the audience rather than to something (scenes or elements) in the play, "scenes of pity and fear," as the phrase may justly be rendered.

II

ANOTHER question vigorously debated by the exegetes has concerned the statement (*Poetics* VI) that the plot (*muthos*) is the soul and first principle (*archē kai psuchē*) of tragedy. A shift of interest to character as a thing somehow appearing apart from or prior to plot is associated historically with the rise of romantic criticism and the drama of soul-analysis through reverie and soliloquy. Today a rigorously minded classical critic may write an essay [3] rebuking Shakespearian studies for overlooking a central Aristotelian principle and indulging too much in thoughts about Shakespeare's characters. But in an earlier chapter of the *Poetics* Aristotle says that poetry imitates men not only in their actions but in their characters and feelings. And he says too that *ēthos* as well as *muthos* is one of the six elements of tragedy. One might be content to say that—whatever the possibly successful imbalances of character or of action in drama, and they are doubtless many—there can be no basic consideration of character and action separately. Or, one might say, plot without character is a puzzle, as in a detective story; character without plot is a series of conversations or soliloquies, as in some romantic closet dramas. "What is character but the determination of incident?" asks Henry James. "What is incident but the illustration of character?" "If a woman stands with her hand on a table and looks at me a certain way it is an incident."[4]

Perhaps not enough has ever been said about Aristotle's slight regard for the sixth element of tragedy in his list, *opsis*, the optical part or spectacle. Mere scene-shifting, he considers it, and scarcely a concern of

[3] E. E. Stoll, "Poetry and the Passions: An Aftermath," *PMLA*, LV (December, 1940), 979–92.

[4] Henry James, *The Art of Fiction*, ed. L. N. Richardson (New York, 1941), p. 86.

criticism.[5] He seems to concur in Plato's disapproval of animal mimicry and artificial thunder claps (*Republic* III, 396) and is thus the second critic of antiquity to take up the long fight by men of good sense against the usurpation of the stage by vaudeville, operatic diversions, and slapstick—"Cato's long wig" and "Flowered gown," Pinkie and the chicken swallowed whole. It is better,—says Aristotle, "to depend on an artistic handling of the story." We ought to get the effect from simply hearing (or reading). This may be an armchair view and rather extreme—but it has the advantage of stressing the verbal and poetic element of drama, that which is most stable and permanently eligible for criticism.

In our last chapter we have considered *to beltion*, or the ideal aim of nature's working in the Aristotelian scheme of universals, as that aim is reflected or paralleled in the human work, the poem, taken as itself a structural entity. It is more difficult—though equally important—to consider how the Aristotelian ideal may relate to nature as an object which the poem represents or imitates. Perhaps Aristotle meant, in an affective sense, that poetry helps our nature towards its norm (catharsis aids nature's ethical purposes as cooking aids digestion). And he does seem to say that nature as imitated in poems is chosen with some kind of reference to ethical values. But this reference, whatever it may be, scarcely seems to be the same thing as measurement by an ethical norm.

Tragic poetry, says Aristotle, may represent men as better than they are, or as they are. Sophocles represented them as better; Euripides, as they are. Poetry, he says again, defending tales of the marvellous against literalistic criticism, may even plead that it is giving us things as they are said to be or as they are thought to be. So far as rewards and punishments are concerned—and they are a great concern in tragedy—distributive justice, to each according to his desert, is a weak dramatic form, a concession to the audience. It appears in comedy. Another weak form is that which only shows the villain suffering an appropriate downfall. It is difficult to entertain any very intense feelings about such an outcome.

The moral bent of the theory comes out more distinctly in the exclusion of two other cases, that where the virtuous man suffers adversity (this produces only shock—*to miaron*), or that where the villain prospers (this is against our moral sense or human feeling—*to philanthrōpon*). Tragedy appears in the nicely balanced and complicated instance where a man of strong character—and of eminent worldly position, like

[5] *Poetics* VI. We have already noticed (*ante* Chapter 2, p. 27) the opinion expressed in the *Politics* that the objects of vision, color, and figure, have a much weaker claim than music to serve as symbols of ethical experience. In a passage near the beginning of the *Poetics* (Ch. IV) concerning the pleasure we experience in recognizing the picture of a person we know, the emphasis seems to be on the universality of the mimetic pleasure: it occurs even in such a simple instance as that of portraiture.

Oedipus or Thyestes—suffers downfall as a result of some error (*di' hamartian tina, di' hamartian megalēn*). And yet he is undeserving (*anaxios*) of so great a downfall (so we may pity him); and he is a man much like ourselves (*homoios*), so we may experience fear at the spectacle of his downfall.[6]

III

A LARGE difference of opinion about Greek tragedy may be epitomized in a difference about the term *hamartia*. Etymologically, this means the missing of a mark with bow and arrow, an unskillful but not morally culpable act. And according to one school of thought *hamartia* in Greek drama is mainly an accent upon a larger tragedy of fate, man's larger suffering, unpredictably and without measure, at the hands of the gods, and man's stoic endurance.[7]

> As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;
> They kill us for their sport.

But the term may also be thought to have implications of moral responsibility (it means *sin* in the Greek of the New Testament). And according to another school, *hamartia* is the crux of a deeply moral (and even Christian) kind of tragedy, the story of man's culpable weakness and his due punishment. Classic Greek literature, from Homer to the tragedians, is full of human character and will engaged in responsible action. Even Antigone, when she hangs herself in the sealed cave, does not elude the criterion. Imagine in the same predicament the much-enduring Odysseus—or remember his courageous and ingenious tactics when a prisoner in the cave of the Cyclops.[8]

But again another, though a somewhat more difficult, notion is possible—one which may do more justice to the uneasy tension between willing and knowing observable in some Greek plays, notably in *Oedipus the King*, and may at the same time be more consonant with the hints of Aristotle when the latter are taken in relation to the main tenor of his thought. Error arises only through ignorance, Socrates had argued again and again, and most eloquently in the *Protagoras* (352). It is not

[6] In another chapter of the *Poetics*, XV, the tragic character must be good (*chrēston*), appropriate (*harmotton*), true to life (*homoion*), and consistent (*homalon*). The second, third, and fourth, if they may be distinguished, make the classical doctrine of character decorum. Cf. *post* Chapter 5.

[7] Seymour M. Pitcher, "Aristotle's Good and Just Heroes," *PQ*, XXIV (January, 1945), 1–11; (April, 1945), 190–1; C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford, 1944), Ch. V.

[8] Lane Cooper, *Aristotelian Papers* (Ithaca, 1939), "The Villain as Hero"; and "'Αμαρτία Again—AND AGAIN," *The Classical Journal*, XLIII (October, 1947), 39–40.

really possible to know what is correct and to do otherwise. But the psychology of Aristotle's *Ethics* is more complicated. Concerned, as so often, to rebut or to qualify the view of Plato or Socrates, he argues in Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics:*

> Now we may ask . . . how a man who judges rightly can behave incontinently. That he should behave so when he has knowledge, some say is impossible; for it would be strange—so Socrates thought—if when knowledge was in a man something else could master it and drag it about like a slave. For Socrates was entirely opposed to the view in question, holding that there is no such thing as incontinence; no one, he said, when he judges acts against what he judges best—people act so only by reason of ignorance. Now this view plainly contradicts the observed facts, and we must inquire about what happens to such a man. . . .
>
> . . . . since there are two kinds of premises, there is nothing to prevent a man's having both premises and acting against his knowledge, provided that he is using only the universal premise and not the particular; for it is particular acts that have to be done. . . .
>
> But now this is just the condition of men under the influence of passion; for outbursts of anger and sexual appetites and some other such passions, it is evident, actually alter our bodily condition, and in some men even produce fits of madness. It is plain, then, that incontinent people must be said to be in a similar condition to men asleep, mad, or drunk.—VII, 2–3

Somehow or other, experience teaches us, it is possible to know the better and do the worse. (*Video meliora, proboque. Deteriora sequor.*)[9] But the degrees of responsibility may be very elusive of definition.

> Now when (1) the injury takes place contrary to reasonable expectation, it is a *misadventure* (*atuchēma*). When (2) it is not contrary to reasonable expectation, but does not imply vice, it is a *mistake* (*hamartēma*) (for a man makes a mistake (*hamartanei*) when the fault originates in him, but is the victim of accident when the origin lies outside him). When (3) he acts with knowledge but not after deliberation, it is an *act of injustice* (*adikēma*)—e.g. the acts due to anger or to other passions necessary or natural to man; for when men do such harmful and mistaken acts (*blaptontes kai hamartanontes*) they act unjustly, and the acts are acts of injustice, but this does not imply that the doers are unjust or wicked; for the injury is not due to

[9] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VII, 20.

> vice (*mochthēria*). But when (4) a man acts from choice, he is an *unjust man* and a vicious man.—*Ethics* V, 8

A close affinity between (3) in this list, the act of passion, and (2), the act of culpable negligence, is further suggested in the continuation of the passage quoted just above from Book VII.

> . . . incontinence . . . is blamed not only as a fault (*hamartia*) but as a kind of vice (*kakia*).[1] VII, 4

In yet another passage (*Ethics* III, 1) even rooted and wicked ignorance, (4) in the list above, is alluded to as *hamartia*. *Hamartia* (error) and its concrete equivalent *hamartēma* (an erroneous act) and the cognate verb *hamartanein* seem to connote an area of senses shading in from a periphery of vice and passion to a center of rash and culpable negligence.[2] Both V, 8 and III, 1 of the *Ethics* include very helpful descriptions of the latter.

> . . . those done in ignorance are *mistakes* (*hamartēmata*) when the person acted on, the act, the instrument, or the end that will be attained is other than the agent supposed; the agent thought either that he was not hitting anyone or that he was not hitting with this missile or not hitting this person or to this end, but a result followed other than that which he thought likely (e.g., he threw not with intent to wound but only to prick), or the person hit or the missile was other than he supposed.—V, 8

> A man may be ignorant, then, of who he is, what he is doing, what or whom he is acting on . . . and to what end (e.g. he may think his act will conduce to someone's safety). . . . of what a man is doing he might be ignorant, as for instance people say, "it slipped out of their mouths as they were speaking," or "they did not know it was a secret," as Aeschylus said of the mysteries, or a man might say he "let it go off when he merely wanted to show its working," as the man did with the catapult. Again, one might think one's son was an enemy, as Merope did, or that a pointed spear had a button on it, or that a stone was pumice-stone; or one might give a man a draught to save, and really kill him; or one might want to touch a man, as people do in sparring, and really wound him.—III, 1

Or—if we may take a very slight liberty of interpolation—one might meet an old man and his retinue at a cross-roads, fall into an altercation, and

[1] *Kakia* seems to be approximately equivalent to the *mochthēria* (vice) mentioned in *Ethics* V, 8 and distinguished from *hamartia* in *Poetics* XIII.

[2] Butcher, pp. 320–1, points out a passage in *Oedipus at Colonus*, ll. 966 ff., where *hamartia* and *hamartanein* shift in successive lines from the connotation of the voluntary to that of the involuntary.

end by killing them all—and one might be ignorant that the old man was one's father. Or one might serve the people of a foreign state by solving a riddle and one might be rewarded with the hand of their queen—and one might be ignorant that the queen was one's mother. "The doing of an act that is called involuntary in virtue of ignorance of this sort," says the *Ethics* (III, 1), "must be painful and involve repentance." It is upon "ignorance of particulars" that "pity and pardon depend." [3]

The matter in question may be even further illustrated by another Aristotelian distinction, that made in the *Physics* between what he called the *spontaneous* (the mechanically determined natural event) and *chance* (the stroke of good or evil fortune).

> Chance (*tuchē*) and what results from chance are appropriate to agents that are capable of good fortune and of moral action generally. Therefore necessarily chance is in the sphere of moral actions. This is indicated by the fact that good fortune (*eutuchia*) is thought to be the same, or nearly the same, as happiness, and happiness to be a kind of moral action, since it is well-doing.
>
> . . . spontaneous events (*hosa apo tou automatou*) are said to be "from chance" if they have the further characteristics of being the objects of deliberate intention and due to agents capable of that mode of action.—*Physics* II, 6

The moral application is developed in passages of the *Rhetoric* concerning the psychology of praise and blame.

> Since praise is founded on actions, and acting according to moral purpose is characteristic of the worthy man, we must endeavour to show that a man is acting in that manner, and it is useful that it should appear that he has done so on several occasions. For this reason also one must assume that accidents and strokes of good fortune are due to moral purpose; for if a number of similar examples can be adduced, they will be thought to be signs of virtue and moral purpose.—I, 9 [4]

[3] Another class of actions treated in Aristotle's *Ethics* (III, 1) as perhaps involuntary are those "done from fear of greater evils or for some noble object." One might perform such an action, for example, "if a tyrant were to order one to do something base, having one's parents and children in his power, and if one did the action they were to be saved, but otherwise would be put to death." The concept of the involuntary defined here, though it does not seem to be central to the *hamartia* discussed in the *Poetics* and *Ethics*, would be clearly available in discussing such a tragic fault as Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia to gain a favoring wind for the expedition against Troy.

[4] Passages of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* quoted in this chapter and the following are reprinted by permission of the publishers from *Aristotle . . . The "Art" of Rhetoric*, translated by John Henry Freese, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939.

Or, as the poet Simonides had already put it:

> . . . a man . . . cannot but be evil if he be overtaken by hopeless calamity; for any man is good in good fortune and bad in bad, and take it all in all, they are best who are loved by the gods.[5]

Fortes fortuna juvat. God helps him that helps himself. The darker side of this wisdom has perhaps always been the one more likely to receive literary treatment, even though the treatment may be comic. Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*, for instance, provides a diminished figure from Greek tragedy in the melancholy, unlovable, and unlucky philosopher servant Epihodof, whose "Twenty Misfortunes a Day" (if he opens a door, the knob comes off in his hand; if he plays billiards, he rips the cloth) are clearly a part of his miserable character. In Greek thought what we encounter is no doubt a primitive notion of Providence: If the gods superintend all things, then both good and bad luck must somehow be their doing, and for sufficient reason. A modern version will be psychological —a Freudian theory of unconsciously deliberate slips, cultivated bad luck, accident-prone persons.[6]

To be responsible for mistakes which are partly unavoidable is bad enough in any area of human activity—it must be worst, and overwhelming, when the area is that of man's relation to the supernatural. An Ancient Mariner shoots a friendly albatross with his crossbow (*hamartia* by hitting the mark) and brings down an appalling punishment on himself and on all his shipmates. When an elderly female novelist complained to Coleridge that the poem did not have any moral, he answered that in his opinion it had "too much." And he went on to say that it should have been altogether without moral like the Arabian Nights story of the merchant who threw date shells down a well putting out, by ill luck, the eye of a genie's son. The genie rose from the well and claimed in retaliation the merchant's life.

It is in this department of man's blundering, that which is committed against the supernatural and is hence boundless in its import and consequences—that we shall have to place the *hamartia* of Aristotle's ideal Greek tragedy, *Oedipus the King*. In the partly analogous Hebrew tragedy of *Job*, the meaning announced at the end by the Voice from the Whirlwind is that Job's sufferings have not been strictly determined by the extent of his own sins. The same meaning is implicit in the *Oedipus*, but the tilt of the emphasis is toward a responsibility, which though it could never have been satisfactorily discharged, Oedipus was yet not

[5] "Eulogy to Scopas," in *Lyra Graeca*, trans. J. M. Edmonds (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1924), vol. II, fr. 19. The fragment is preserved in the *Protagoras* of Plato, 339, 347.

[6] See Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York, 1914).

free to evade. If on the one hand Oedipus is predestined to destruction, on the other hand, the particular time, features, and fullness of his suffering are determined ironically by the kind of militant scepticism which he shares with his mother, and by his own violent efforts to get free. The rashness which may be traced in his early actions—the flight from Corinth and the murder of Laius—only prefigures the hasty, ill-tempered, and irreverent steps of his inquisition on the day of downfall.[7]

IV

WE HAVE talked in our last chapter about Aristotle's theory of poetry as a theory of poetic form. But it is a theory of form only in the sense by which *form* has plenary implications for what may be thought of, from another point of view, as poetic content. Two precise and technical Aristotelian concepts, already mentioned briefly in our last chapter, serve very well to show the interdependence of the two sides of the theory. *Peripeteia* (sudden reversal) and *anagnōrisis* (recognition) are the pivots of the complex action (*peplegmenē praxis*) preferred by Aristotle; they are a formal necessity in the well-developed whole of a certain size, the action with beginning, middle, and end, where good and evil are adequately set against each other. At the same time, *peripeteia* and *anagnōrisis* are key incidents in the serious story (*muthos*) of the upright protagonist, his *hamartia*, and his suffering. *Peripeteia* is an acute form of *metabasis* or change from good to bad. In the light of Aristotle's examples (the messenger from Corinth comes to cheer Oedipus but clinches the revelation of horror; Danaus leads off Lynceus for the purpose of executing him but is himself executed—) it would seem that *peripeteia* means something very much like a reversal of expectation or frustration of purpose, an "unexpected catastrophe resulting from a deed unwittingly done."[8] *Peripeteia*, says one classical scholar, is a kind of irony of action. Irony of words, so frequent also in Greek tragedy and so telling, occurs "when words, are caught up by circumstances and charged with a fuller meaning than the speaker meant." Irony of action occurs when "deeds are caught up out of an agent's grasp and charged with a meaning the very opposite" of what was meant.[9] *Anagnōrisis*, when used, as it may be, in close junction with *peripeteia*, is the hero's realization of the truth, the full meaning of the deed done in error. There

[7] For a detailed exposition of the play as a "critique of rationalism," see Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman, *Understanding Drama* (New York, 1948), pp. 573 ff.

[8] Atkins, I, 91; F. L. Lucas, "The Reverse of Aristotle," *Classical Review*, XXXVII (1923), 98–104; and his *Tragedy in Relation to Aristotle's "Poetics"* (London, 1928), pp. 91 ff.

[9] Atkins, I, 92; W. Lock, "The Use of περιπέτεια in Aristotle's *Poetics*," *Classical Review*, IX (1895), 251–3.

are six kinds, says Aristotle, of which the most effective is not that of the scar discovered in the bath (as on the return of Odysseus to Ithaca) or that deliberately contrived by one of the characters (as when Orestes makes himself known to Iphigenia) but that which grows naturally from the very workings of the plot—and the example is that of the messenger in *Oedipus*. *Peripeteia* and *anagnōrisis*, we suggest, are but the due developments and complements of *hamartia;* they are the surprising, but natural, aftermath of the partly responsible act of error. The reversal, says Aristotle, should follow its antecedents in a way that is probable or necessary—but it is much better if the way is also surprising. If there were no surprise—that is, if the downfall were clearly predictable or acceptable from the start as the only plausible outcome of the protagonist's fault—we should have not *hamartia* as it may be accurately conceived, but the fully vicious act of the villain. *Peripeteia* and *anagnōrisis* are requirements for the action of a certain magnitude—an action large enough to exhibit the development of a character through confidence, error, recognition and suffering. These two technicalities are specifications for the kind of moral consequence, crossed by surprise, which makes the cohesive beginning, middle, and end, the whole and unity of Aristotle's formal theory. "It may perhaps be," said a later Greek writer in the Aristotelian vein, "that nature has a liking for contraries and evolves harmony out of them and not out of similarities. . . . The arts . . . apparently imitate nature in this respect." [1]

V

WHAT of comedy? Opposite and complement of tragedy, the other half of Greek drama, it is so different a half, and may seem in its marked physical response of laughter so different from all the rest of poetry as to resist being assimilated into any general poetics either of form or of content. Like catharsis, comedy is a topic upon which Aristotle may have said more in a second part of his *Poetics*.[2] It is a topic to which he refers several times in the extant part of the *Poetics*, but rather casually, as if comedy were a minor genre, a reverse or grotesque of serious poetry. This was the kind of poetry that would deal with men as worse than they are (II) or at least as uglier than they are. Plato in the *Philebus* (48–50) had thought the comic response a kind of malicious joy or emotion of self-enhancement at the spectacle of obnoxious characters (those who in real life could hurt us) made innocuous on the stage. Aristotle, with a more kindly insight, is concerned about the pain which those who

[1] *De Mundo*, Chapter 5 (trans. E. S. Forster [Oxford, 1914], 396[b]).
[2] Cf. *Rhetoric* III, 18; I, 11; *Poetics* VI.

exhibit deformities may themselves be imagined to suffer or not to suffer. The well-known definition runs as follows:

> Comedy is, as we have said, an imitation of characters of a lower type,—not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the ludicrous (*to geloion*) being merely a subdivision of the ugly (*to aischron*). It consists of some defect (*hamartēma*) or ugliness which is not painful (*anōdunon*) and not destructive[3] (*ou phthartikon*). To take an obvious example, the comic mask (*to geloion prosōpon*) is ugly and distorted, but does not imply pain.—V

A recently too much celebrated document, the *Tractatus Coislinianus*,[4] a late peripatetic deductive parallel to the chapters of the *Poetics* on tragedy, adds to our definition a cathartic clause.

> Comedy is an imitation of an action that is ludicrous and imperfect . . . through pleasure and laughter effecting the purgation of the like emotions.

This seems a plausible guess. It is supported by our finding in Aristotle's *Ethics* (X, 6) the thesis that happiness consists not in amusement but in rational activity, and by the fact that both Plato and Aristotle include laughter among the politically dangerous emotions. Plato in both the *Republic* (III, 388–395) and *Laws* (VII, 816–17; XI, 934–6) looks on the act of comic mimesis as a dangerous contagion; he would man the comic stage with slaves and hired strangers. Aristotle remarks in his *Politics* (VII, 7) that "the legislator should not allow youth to be spectators of iambi or of comedy until they are of an age to sit at the public tables or to drink strong wine."[5] This kind of catharsis for comedy would be homeopathic (the purging of laughter by working it off) and would be neatly symmetrical with Aristotle's answer to Plato concerning the tragic catharsis. At the same time, it is at least possible to construct another theory of comic catharsis along lines suggested in Plato's *Philebus*, where, as we have noted, laughter is release from the mental pain of envy, and in a passage of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (II, 3) asserting that "We

[3] The example of the comic mask which follows seems to refute those who would translate this "destructive to others."

[4] Called so from the De Coislin Collection in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, from which it was printed by J. A. Cramer in his *Anecdota Graeca* in 1839. The manuscript is of the tenth century A.D.; the contents date apparently from about the first century B.C. See Lane Cooper, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy* (New York, 1922), p. 10.

[5] Among the "Characters" of Aristotle's successor Theophrastus is the Ruffian or Reckless Man who "is not ashamed, even while sober, to exhibit himself in the lascivious dance, or to play a part in comedy unmasked." For a recent exposition of this view of comic catharsis, see J. C. Ransom, *The World's Body* (New York, 1938), "The Cathartic Principle," pp. 188–9.

are placable when we are in a condition opposed to angry feeling, for example, at a time of sport or laughter or festivity." [6] But this would be allopathic catharsis and not symmetrical with the tragic. The present writers are content to leave this problem where it stands.

A more specifically critical problem is posed in the *Poetics* by a series of statements in which Aristotle draws a comparison between the "Old," lampooning, or Aristophanic comedy (for the sake of convenience it may be said to have ended with the Athenian downfall of 404) and the "New" or Menandrian comedy (dating after the conquest by the Macedonians in 338). Tragedy had originated in Dionysiac ritual dithyrambics; comedy had originated with the leaders of phallic songs in the *kōmoi* or village Dionysiac revels (IV). Back of each at another remove stood Homer.

> Homer . . . first laid down the main lines of Comedy, by dramatizing the ludicrous instead of writing personal satire. His Margites bears the same relation to Comedy that the Iliad and Odyssey do to Tragedy. . . . lampooners became writers of Comedy, and the Epic poets were succeeded by Tragedians. —IV

Lampoon, however, seems to have been a deviation from Homer in the wrong direction toward personality; lampoon was not all it should be.

> As for the plot, it came originally from Sicily; but of Athenian writers Crates was the first who, abandoning the "iambic" or lampooning form, generalized his themes and plots.—V

> In comedy . . . the poet first constructs the plot on the lines of probability, and then inserts characteristic names;—unlike the lampooners who write about particular individuals.—IX

Aristotle's conception of comedy seems even better satisfied by later Hellenistic new comedy and the Roman translations of Terence and Plautus than by the sentimental intrigues found actually in the Middle Comedy and the New Comedy of his own day. It may seem rash to say [7] that he did not appreciate the hilarity of the older lampooning comedy. But at least he must have thought comedy had been moving in the right direction. His remarks about comedy are better illustrated by almost any play of Plautus than by the masterpieces of Aristophanes.

In tragedy, he says, the poet took the already legendary name and rewrote the already known story around it. In comedy he took "characteristic" names (*ou ta tuchonta onomata*). The phrase is an emendation by Butcher, but seems eminently plausible. The plays of Plautus and Terence and the fragments and titles of Greek New Comedy and Mid-

[6] Lane Cooper, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–70.
[7] With Butcher, p. 380.

dle Comedy yield a large and various collection of label names[8]—racial names of slaves, like *Cario* or *Syrus*, type names like *Monotropos* (Hermit) or *Polypragmon* (Busybody), compound suggestions like *Philocomasium* (Village Revel Girl), *Artotrogus* (Breadnibbler), *Pamphile* (All-dear), or the monstrosity *Pyrgopolynices* (Conqueror of Towered Cities). Such names illustrate in a nicely definable and tabloid form a difficult poetic choice, that between naturalism (truth to life) and significance. Shall a playwright sacrifice reality for the easy symbolism of the label name, or shall he sacrifice significance for the convincing realism of a name which is as pointless as most of those in real life? Or shall he escape the dilemma by using a common noun, a "citizen," a "tapster," a "slave," a "messenger," or a "soldier," a "1st man in blue serge," a "2nd man in blue serge" (the names of minor dramatic characters from Aeschylus to our own day)?

Both Greek comedy and Greek tragedy decided mainly for the significant name, that of the type or that of the known historic person, the difference between the two being a part of the difference between the meaning of the comic character and that of the tragic. In the *Ethics* of Aristotle virtue is reasonable activity along a line of moderation, on both sides of which are the vices of extremity. A slant toward comic theory is quite pronounced in the description (IV, 8; II, 7) of the tasteful or ready-witted gentleman joker (*eutrapelos*)[9] and the extremes between which he stands, the uncultivated boor, an enemy of jokes (*agroikos*), and the buffoon (*bōmolochos*), who tries to be funny at all costs. One may see the difference between good and bad taste in wit, says Aristotle, "in the old and the new[1] comedies; to the authors of the former indecency (*aischrologia*) of language was amusing; to those of the latter innuendo (*huponoia*)[2] is more so." Again, we encounter (IV, 7) the admirably mock-modest or Socratic man (*eirōn*) and his antitypes the humbug, he who assumes modesty about trifles, and the boaster (*alazōn*), obvious precursor of the Hellenistic *Alazōn* and the Plautine Miles Gloriosus.[3] But if comedy deals with inferior examples of humanity, how, one may wonder, is the ironist, a near neighbor of the

[8] The term "charactonym" has been recently suggested to fill a kind of gap in English critical vocabulary (Thomas E. Berry, in *Word Study*, XXV, December, 1949, 1).

The plays of Plautus contain more of these significant names than of the opposite kind.

[9] Cf. *Rhetoric* II, 12, wit (*eutrapelia*) as "cultured insolence."

[1] I.e., Middle.

[2] The *Tractatus Coislinianus* uses the terms *loidoria* and *emphasis* for the same contrast.

[3] The buffoon, the ironist, and the boaster are named as specific comic types in the *Tractatus Coislinianus*. A near equivalence between *eirōneia* and *huponoia* is indicated in a passage of the *Rhetoric* (III, 18), where the gentleman, or ironist, who jokes to amuse himself, is set against the buffoon (*bōmolochos* again), who tries too hard to amuse others.

truthful mean, to be taken as a comic type? How is *huponoia*, the conversational style of the gentleman, to be associated with "New Comedy" or with any form of comedy at all? The answer is perhaps not explicit in ancient documents but may be suggested in the speculation that comedy has always required in addition to its gulls and butts such critical agents as the clever slave and planner, the gentleman commentator and wit. It might almost be a definition of a certain more sophisticated kind of comedy to say that it arises from the opposition of mixed characters or sets of mixed characters, composites who serve reciprocally as butts and critics.

Aristotle treats virtues no less than vices as clearly conceptualized types, but he has a tendency to see the vices more vividly. The tendency is continued and accentuated by his pupil and successor Theophrastus, in whose *Characters*[4] we find such contrasting pairs as the obsequious man (*areskos*) and the surly (*authadēs*), the boaster (*alazōn*) and the mock-modest (*eirōn*), and with these such companions in unattractiveness as the loquacious and the garrulous, the flatterer and the complaisant, the penurious, the avaricious, and the mean. Theophrastus gives us a nosology, a gallery of nasty persons. Greek ethical theory and comic theory are strongly alike in finding vice, much more than virtue, susceptible of fixed portraiture. The names of six out of the thirty Theophrastan Characters are the same as titles of lost plays by Menander.[5] And Menander is said to have been the pupil of Theophrastus.

These correlations between vice and comedy may be taken as the reverse of the truth that virtue is not only a mean but a course of conduct which requires such positive qualities as strength of purpose and courage, and which is best seen in a dynamic form, in motion toward an object. The comically evil character stands still, despite warnings and punishments, and his "sufficient destiny" is simply to go on revealing himself.[6] "Greek tragedy . . ." says Butcher, "combines in one harmonious representation the individual and the universal. Whereas comedy tends to merge the individual in the type, tragedy manifests the type through the individual" (p. 388). This may not be so easy a distinction as it sounds. But at least we can say that in tragedy we start with a known individual, Oedipus or Agamemnon, and see what he comes to—at what being and meaning he arrives through a certain development. In comedy (or at least in Greek New Comedy) we start, on the other hand, with the defined meaning, and it remains defined or fixed. We only more or less fill it out with examples. (It is a mechanism which we employ to-

[4] *Ēthikoi charaktēres*, they were called by Diogenes Laertius, the earliest extant writer of antiquity to refer to them. See *The Characters of Theophrastus*, trans. R. C. Jebb (London, 1870).

[5] *Menander*, ed. F. G. Allinson (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1921), p. xiii. Cf. Butcher, pp. 377–9.

[6] Cf. Maynard Mack, ed. *Joseph Andrews* (New York, 1948), pp. xiii–xiv.

ward some more complex overall end.) And this is partly because, just as Aristotle says, comedy deals with the inferior—and hence with a kind of human character which may at least be supposed to occur very readily in everyday life. The Aristotelian notion of the tragic protagonist as king or at least as man of eminence was complemented more explicitly, with an opposite notion for comedy, perhaps by Aristotle himself in a lost dialogue *On Poets*, perhaps by his pupil Theophrastus,[7] certainly by later theorists. "Imitatio vitae," Cicero was to call comedy, "speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis." [8]

Tragedy and comedy show different, though understandably different, relations to the Aristotelian universal. One hinge of this unity and difference is *hamartia*. (The nearly synonymous *hamartēma* is the name of the comic flaw in Aristotle's definition of comedy.) Tragedy takes *hamartia* literally but magnifies its punishment—and is thus fearful and pitiful. Comedy distorts *hamartia* by caricature, reduces punishment to discomfiture and mortification, and is thus ridiculous. The victorious general Agamemnon returns to Argos with the captive princess Cassandra; Pyrgopolynices, the braggart captain, arrives at Ephesus with the captured slave girl Philocomasium. In the second half of the *Miles Gloriosus*, when Pyrgopolynices is tricked into attempting a marriage with a harlot supposed to be his next-door neighbor's wife, we are at least in the general region of the Oedipus transgression. But where the tragic heroes suffered death and self-inflicted blindness, the braggart soldier meets the catastrophe of an ignominious beating and responds by bellowing out a confession of his several errors.[9] In the fragmentary *Perikeiromenē* (*She Who Got Sheared*) of Menander, the girl describes the rape of her locks by the sailor lover with the verb *hubrizein*,[1] cognate with the tragic name (*hubris*) for man's eruption out of his proper sphere. These parallels are consistent with what has been observed as a broader degeneration during the fifth and fourth centuries in Greek concepts of character, from the *authadeia* which with Aeschylus was Promethean self-will to the mere "surliness" which adequately renders the term in the *Character* by Theophrastus,[2] from *eirōneia* as a philosophic stratagem in the Platonic dia-

[7] Atkins I, 159; A. P. McMahon, "On the Second Book of Aristotle's *Poetics* and the Source of Theophrastus' Definition of Tragedy" and "Seven Questions on Aristotelian Definitions of Tragedy and Comedy," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, XXVIII (1917), 1–46; XL (1929), esp. 100–3. The argument rests on statements made by the fourth-century grammarians Diomedes and Donatus.

[8] Cicero, *De Re Publica* IV, 13, quoted by Donatus, *Excerpta de Comoedia* (Atkins II, 38).

[9] Pyrgopolynices might also be profitably compared with the romantically successful bully fellow Hercules in the *Alcestis* of Euripides, or the mock Hercules Dionysus in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes.

[1] Act IV, l. 600 (Loeb *Menander*, p. 256): Glycera: [*eis allas koras*] *hubrizetō to loipon.*

[2] Cf. G. Gordon, "Theophrastus and His Imitators" in *English Literature and the Classics* (Oxford, 1912), p. 53.

logues and a gentlemanly form of modesty in Aristotle's *Ethics* to the chicanery of the Theophrastan Dissembler: "A man of this sort (*ho de eirōn*) approaches his enemy with professions of friendship; he flatters those against whom he is plotting mischief; and he condoles with them in the way of their calamity."

VI

THE division of Greek drama into comic and tragic and Aristotle's corresponding theory would seem to represent a tension of principles that extends into literature and life perhaps not so deeply as some recent speculators have maintained, but deeply enough. We reduce the following table of mutually dependent "antinomic symbols" from Mr. Albert Cook's *The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean, A Philosophy of Comedy*.[8] Under one or the other of these two opposed but interdependent headings we have nearly all that may be conceived in the realm of human interests.

TRAGEDY	COMEDY
The Wonderful	*The Probable*
Imagination	*Reason*
Ethics	*Manners*
The Individual	*Society*
The Extreme (Christianity)	*The Mean (Aristotle)*
Symbol	*Concept*
Death	*Politics, Sex*
Good and Evil	*Conformity or Expulsion*
The Handsome Actor	*The Ugly Actor*
The Pariah Artist	*The Diplomatic Artist*
Failure	*Success*
Soliloquy	*Aside*
The Superhuman	*The Subhuman (beast, machine)*
Aristocrat	*Bourgeois*
Paradox	*Contrast*

We venture to add this tentative thought: that the two sides of this interesting dichotomy may be more closely interdependent in literature than in life—that a certain union of the two may well be near to the center of whatever is universal in poetry.

Aristotle, by his formal analysis of the two dominant genres of Greek literature, made a respectable effort to rebut Plato's arguments against poetry and to answer the business-like and Rotarian questions of Socrates in the *Ion*. The answer is perhaps not ironclad, but it has at least one important virtue, namely, that it tends to shift the emphasis of inquiry

[8] Cambridge, Mass., 1949. Our table is selected and adapted from pp. 28 and 50–1.

away from what poetry may *say*, or tell us, in a practical or even in a philosophic sense, toward what poetry may embody or in itself *be*. And this the answer accomplishes through its *double* concern for the universal—that is, its concern both for what is imitated or reflected in the poem and for the poem itself as a form or kind of being in which the imitation is realized. As Aristotle's theory is a theory of imitation, it is a theory of reference (what the poem *is* never really escapes entanglement with what the poem *says*); it is a theory of a universal and an ideal in the field of reference, and this ideal tends to be the ethical man. Still this ideal is never quite that. The theory never quite says that the poetic worth of the imitation is to be decided directly in terms of the practical ideal. Whether poetry is something which charms (as Homer and the Thracians had said) or something which teaches (as Hesiod and the Boeotians said) [4] was an inherited issue which Aristotle met not head on but by the oblique device of saying that poetry is something which pleases us by being an image and by being at the same time very serious and very philosophic (*philosophōteron kai spoudaioteron*).

We conclude our account of Aristotle's debate with Plato by alluding to the spirited judgment of a modern French critic, the Abbé Henri Bremond in his *Prière et Poésie*. His first chapter, "*Platon et la Poésie Exilée*," speaks well enough for present purposes in its title. From the second chapter, "*Aristote et la Poésie Dépoétisée*," we attempt the following translation of an apologia put in the mouth of Aristotle.

> As for the meaning which is captured in a poem, though it may have been as it were divinely discovered through that *theia dunamis* of which professor Socrates tells us, it remains nevertheless intelligible and as a result definable. If a doctor is able to enumerate the parts of a human skeleton, it hardly follows that he is open to censure for not being interested in life. He follows his anatomical bent; I follow mine as logician. You profess to deplore the fact that I have put poetry under "the absolute yoke of reason." But it is not quite clear to me where you get that idea. That fantastic line about "sole reason," the first principle of all poetic beauty, is not to be found in my own writings so far as I know. . . . It is not as if I had overlooked, as you seem to suppose, that specific and ineffable quality which constitutes the poetic experience. It is simply that I am not concerned with it—unless in that famous statement of mine about catharsis [5]—a somewhat obscure expression, I admit, but one

[4] Atkins I, 80–1; W. C. Greene, "The Greek Criticism of Poetry" in *Perspectives of Criticism*, ed. Harry Levin (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p. 21.

[5] As a matter of fact Aristotle makes some casual acknowledgements of poetic inspiration. In the *Poetics* (XVII) he speaks of the poet as *euphuēs* rather than *manikos;* in the *Rhetoric* (III, 7) poetry is an inspired thing (*entheon hē poiēsis*).

> from which they will someday derive a thoroughgoing mystical poetics.

And the Abbé's comment on this:

> He tells the truth. There is no metaphysic, either right or wrong, in his *Poetics.* There is no other heresy than that of silence—the most dangerous of all—Aristotle's sin of omission, his disappearing trick. He has not written a single sentence from which one might convict him of setting aside the traditional view of the poet's inspiration and identifying poetic knowledge with rational. But then he has not written a sentence either—except to be sure that about catharsis—from which one might even suspect the contrary. To remain silent is to consent. Aristotle has kept his silence—silence forever to be deplored—silence pregnant with catastrophe, pregnant, if I may so express myself, with Boileau.[6]

This seems the place for a candid assertion that our own view as theorists of poetry is something like that which Aristotle is made to confess. We argue that criticism, if it is to occur at all, must be like that. It must be rational and aim at definitions, whether it can or cannot quite achieve them. But what is left over and above definition, we argue furthermore, is still an objective quality of poems, knowable if indefinable, and distinguishable from that other realm, the dark well of mystery and inspiration[7]—which is the poet's alone. If these two areas, the knowable yet indefinable individuality of the poem, and the unknowable or incommunicable mystery of the poet's inspiration, are alleged to show limits to the critic's activity, we concede the point. The first area, the individuality of the poetic utterance, may tease the critic's ambition. He would conquer it if he could though this is not required of him. With the second, the inspiration, he is scarcely concerned.

[6] Henri Bremond, *Prière et Poésie* (Paris, 1926), Chapter II, translated by permission of Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., London.

[7] A more recent, and to the present time perhaps the largest and most brilliant celebration of this "translucid spiritual night" is Jacques Maritain's *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953). Mr. Maritain, so far as he would grant any significance at all to the concerns of the present narrative, would say that they are the concerns of "art," not of "poetry." There is a partial sense in which he would be perfectly right.

SUPPLEMENT

I connect the essential distinction between tragedy and comedy with two opposing impulses deeply rooted in human nature. Until we can find a way of reconciling the antinomy in our nature we are all torn between the desire to *find* ourselves and the desire to *lose* ourselves. It is on some such antithesis as this that Coleridge based his whole philosophy and in particular his theory of imagination.

We are impelled to preserve and accentuate and glory in our separate lives; we believe that every member of our species has his particular and distinct destiny; there are even atheists who cannot bring themselves to believe in the possibility of their own extinction. This natural pride of man and in man I believe to be the psychological foundation of tragedy. . . .

But if there is a proper human pride, there is also a proper human modesty; and the two are never, I think, far from each other. We cherish our separateness jealously; but we need also to merge it in the life of the world into which we were born, to mix with other people, to adjust our own wills and even our characters to the *milieu* in which by choice or necessity we live and to the general laws of nature. This second impulse is surely as healthy and strong as the other, and it is found in men of the most vigorous and robust character; Blake, for instance, cries in one of his most moving lines

"O why was I born with a different face?"

We cannot be satisfied with the mere assertion of our individuality; we must recognize a destiny other than our individual destinies: the *destiny of our race.* From one point of view every sparrow is infinitely important; from another the greatest man is completely unimportant. These two truths are complementary, and perhaps neither has much meaning without the other. This is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian religion; but one does not need to be a Christian to recognize its truth.

—L. J. Potts, *Comedy* (London, 1949), pp. 16–18, by permission of Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Limited, London

It may be said that whereas tragedy deals with the unusual but normal, comedy deals with the abnormal but not unusual. The abnormality of comic characters is not absolute; we should feel that they are capable of behaving normally if they would. But it is the main concern of the comic writer to discriminate between what is normal and abnormal in human behaviour; he is detached from his subject-matter in a sense in which other artists are not. He needs not merely a strong feeling for normality, but also a clear notion of it. It is therefore necessary for him to be in some measure a moral philosopher; for the norm is a philosophical concept. The usual, or average, is not; it can be calculated statistically from observed facts. But normality, like the cognate concepts of health and sanity, is not a fact, nor a complex of facts, nor even a simplification of facts; it is an idea, and exists only in the mind that has

brought itself to bear on all the relevant facts. There is not one norm of human behaviour, but many: some of them widely divergent and even contradictory. Jane Austen's norm differs drastically in some respects from Chaucer's or Fielding's. But all comic writers must have a norm in view. To detect eccentricity you must have a centre: that is to say a consistent, if not consciously worked out, standard of character and conduct.

—L. J. Potts, *Comedy*, pp. 46–7

Greek tragedy is the tragedy of necessity: i.e., the feeling aroused in the spectator is "What a pity it had to be this way"; Christian tragedy is the tragedy of possibility, "What a pity it was this way when it might have been otherwise." . . . the hubris which is the flaw in the Greek hero's character is the illusion of a man who knows himself strong and believes that nothing can shake that strength, while the corresponding Christian sin of Pride is the illusion of a man who knows himself weak but believes he can by his own efforts transcend that weakness and become strong. . . .

A modern reader, accustomed to the tragedy of possibility, instinctively asks, "Where and when did he make the wrong choice?" and as instinctively answers, "He should not have listened to the prophecy in the first place, or, having done so, then he should never have struck the old man or anyone else, and should never have married Jocasta or anyone else." But such thoughts would never have occurred to Sophocles or his audience. Macbeth and Captain Ahab are wrong to listen to the prophecies about them, because they are equivocal, and each reads into his a possibility he is wrong to desire; the prophecy Oedipus hears is not only not unequivocal but something he is right to wish to avoid. When he kills the old man he feels no guilt, neither is he expected to feel any, and when he marries Jocasta there is nothing the matter with the relation as such. It is only when it turns out that, as a matter of fact, the former was his father and the latter is his mother that the guilt begins. . . .

Other Greek heroes are faced with the tragic choice between two evils: Agamemnon must either sacrifice his daughter or fail in his duty to the Greek Army; Antigone must be false either to her loyalty to her brother or to her loyalty to her city.

The tragic situation, of learning that one is a criminal or of being forced to become one, is not created by the flaw in the hero's character, but is sent him by the gods as a punishment for having such a flaw.

The pessimistic conclusion that underlies Greek tragedy seems to be this: that if one is a hero, i.e., an exceptional individual, one must be guilty of hubris and be punished by a tragic fate; the only alternative and not one a person can choose for himself is to be a member of the chorus, i.e., one of the average mass; to be both exceptional and good is impossible.

How does "Moby Dick" compare with this?

The hero, Captain Ahab, far from being exceptionally fortunate, is at the beginning, what in a Greek tragedy he could only be at the end, exceptionally unfortunate. He is already the victim of what the modern newspaper, which is Greek in this respect, would call a tragedy; a whale has bitten off his leg. What to the Greeks could only have been a punishment for sin is here a temp-

tation to sin, an opportunity to choose; by making the wrong choice and continuing to make it, Ahab punishes himself.

—W. H. Auden, "The Christian Tragic Hero," *The New York Times Book Review*, December 16, 1945, p. 1, by permission of the author and *The New York Times*

It is . . . a strange and a rather embarrassing phenomenon that precisely the centuries which were thoroughly unconversant with such an enthusiastic and flying humanism produced great tragedy; while precisely those periods that had dedicated themselves entirely and without reserve to the possibility of progress and social surge failed again and again to hit off the true tragic note. Indeed, as one courses through these readings and commentaries of a half-generation ago on modern tragedy, one cannot quite get rid of the constant suspicion that *all* the evidence had been tampered with, subtly, better still, unconsciously. The facts had been rather badly twisted, so badly that as a consequence we are now in rapid danger of having our sense of the tragic completely perverted. The truth of the matter comes down to this: that it was our modern tragic literature and theory that alone inserted these strange concepts of exaltation and triumph (and did not write tragedy); while in other periods these notions have been remarkable for their absence, indeed for their rejection (yet tragedy was written). And though this writer hesitates to broach so scandalous a thesis, yet he cannot contain the suspicion that it was exactly this heresy of exaltation, and all the splendid adjectives out of which it was compounded, that was partly responsible in our times for our very great failure in the theater. . . .

We have but to try anything mightily and see what happens. In the end we come back to the decision of everyone of the great tragedies that, left to itself, the human will at the very height of its straining stands broken and defeated. . . . If, for example, we should picture the fact of defeat in terms of the metrical pattern of a production of the *Oedipus*, it should be in terms of the confident forward iambics of a machine of perfect dignity that bit by bit begins to disintegrate, in the end loses all sense of an ictus in the pattering, stuttering rows of consecutive short-syllabled feet of a blinded man, and in the very end does not even have the energy to complete the final iamb. It hangs in the air and there is nothing left. There is neither room nor energy for those artificial endings of defiance and mystical victory that we love to tack on to our tragedies. These things are lies, at least in the sense that there is no evidence for their possibility or validity. They are completely outside the *human* story and neither history nor theology can give any ground for them.

—William F. Lynch, "Confusion in Our Theater," *Thought, Fordham University Quarterly*, XXVI (Autumn, 1951), 346, 349, by permission of the editors of *Thought*

CHAPTER 4

THE VERBAL MEDIUM: PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

§ *The verbal medium, "rhetoric" as verbal artifice, Sicilian rhetoricians—II. Plato's* Phaedrus: *love, beauty, rhetoric, the speech of Lysias (a bad speech badly written), the mock speech of Socrates (style without truth), second speech of Socrates (eloquent truth)—III. theoretical discussion by Socrates: dialectic,* psuchagogia, *Socratic ethic, rhetoric as an ignorant "knack," rhetorical technicalities, written vs. spoken words—IV. Isocrates, epideictic rhetoric, a florid* paideia—*V. Aristotle's* Rhetoric: *a practical defence, rhetoric, dialectic, and the probable, ethical and emotive arguments, verbal style, something superficial yet significant, clarity, propriety, and the ornate, metaphor, related figures—VI. Isocrates again, the power of words, the Logos, grammar, dialecticians vs. rhetoricians, Ciceronian retrospect* §

WE HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT POETIC IMITATION AS IF IT WERE a straight copy of its objects, or a vision of them through plate glass; and in so doing we have minimized the possibility of talking about the poem rather than about its objects, about what it may *be* rather than about what it may *say*. In our first three chapters we have heard a debate conducted upon grounds of maximum advantage to the Platonic moral cause. Let us return now to the fact that Aristotle treated plot, character, and thought—the *content* of drama—as only some of its elements. Let us recall that he treated also, by a method of separation which may have seemed to us at first glance rather crude, two elements which he called the *medium*—language and music—and that there was even another element which he called the *manner*—the stage spectacle. Among these three elements, language stands out as a

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thing basic to all literature. Language is an inevitable concern of literary criticism. And this fact invites us to canvass a part of ancient critical history which for want of a better name we shall call *Rhetoric.*

It is a commonplace of recent critical history to observe that ancient rhetoric, from its formal beginning near the end of the fifth century B.C. to its second sophistication in the early Christian centuries, was basically a practical art, concerned, that is, with the business of persuading judges in law courts, senators in assemblies, and congregations in churches. The counter facts which we insist on here are that this legal or political art came in Roman times to be practically equivalent to higher education, and that from first to last it dwelt characteristically upon verbal artifice. It was in this art rather than in that of poetics that words were most often deliberately studied, and its examples were drawn indiscriminately from poetry and prose. "The art of contention in speech," says Socrates in the *Phaedrus,*

> is not confined to courts and political gatherings, but apparently, if it is an art at all, it would be one and the same in all kinds of speaking, the art by which a man will be able to produce a resemblance between all things between which it can be produced.—261 [1]

The term *rhetoric* has, and has had from early times, the highly useful secondary sense: *a study of how words work.* It is primarily in this sense that we shall use the term throughout this book.

Corax and Tisias were Sicilian sophists who flourished about fifty years before the birth of Aristotle. They taught legal rhetoric in Syracuse and wrote the earliest recorded treatises on the art, but these have perished. One of their successors was Gorgias of Leontini, who came to Athens on an embassy in 427 and remained to instruct and fascinate the generation of young intellectuals and aesthetes portrayed in the *Clouds* of Aristophanes. A later Sicilian Greek historian has left this account of the matter:

> On arriving at Athens and being allowed to address the people, he [Gorgias] spoke on the theme of federation in a style of such exotic artifice that he cast a spell over his audience, euphuistically inclined as they were and devoted to the ideal of eloquence. He was the first to use the strikingly artificial figures of antithesis, isocolon, parison, homoeoteleuton, and sundry other embellishments of this kind, which came at that time as admired

[1] With one exception, indicated in a note, quotations from Plato's *Phaedrus* in this chapter are reprinted by permission of the publishers from the translation of H. N. Fowler, *Plato . . . Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus,* 1938, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

> novelties, though now they seem rather ridiculously affected and precious.[2]

Gorgias and a fellow rhetorician Polus are the antagonists of Socrates in an early and lengthy Platonic attack on rhetoric, the dialogue entitled *Gorgias;* and the same rhetorical school is the subject of criticism in the mature, highly sophisticated and dramatic *Phaedrus,* a document which is not only the earliest substantial counter-rhetoric now surviving but is still one of the most formidable in all rhetorical history.

II

THE *Phaedrus* contains some of the best-known Platonic passages on love and beauty—ones which we have alluded to in an earlier chapter —most notably the illustrative oration by Socrates built on the elaborate allegory of the soul or intellective principle as charioteer, with difficulty driving his two horses, a noble steed of the higher desires and a balky beast of the lower passions, toward the empyreal sphere of divine forms. Classical scholars have disagreed as to whether this main motif of the dialogue shows sufficient relevance to an equally conspicuous second motif—an examination of the art of rhetoric. The relevance between the two motifs (and hence the unity of the whole dialogue) actually seems very close. It is the relevance of ideal illustration to a theory of an art ideally conceived. A main assumption of the whole dialogue is the Socratic principle that virtue is knowledge, and, springing from this, the main argument is that a worthy rhetoric—one aimed at the highest good—will be, not a way of fooling people in law courts, but an approach to knowledge, or an embodiment of it—a kind of inspired philosophy. The theme of love and beauty, which Plato believed to be the only adequate theme of philosophy, was the only one which he could have employed for the full illustration of the thesis.

The argument begins adroitly with an enthusiastic reading by Phaedrus, and a cool analysis by Socrates, of a shoddy speech—either an actual speech of the orator Lysias or a parody—an academic invective against ardent lovers.[3] The objections of Socrates are two: that the speech is wrongheaded (though he ironically professes not to urge this) and that its style is confused. Some sort of connection between these two facts is perhaps a main innuendo.

> SOCRATES: How now? Are you and I to praise the speech because the author has said what was called for, or is the sole

[2] Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* XII, 53.

[3] The homosexual meaning alluded to in our first chapter is to be assumed throughout this discussion.

> point whether the expressions, taken singly, are clear, compact, and finely turned? If we must judge it by the substance, I readily give way to your opinion; the substance because of my ineptitude, escaped me. I paid attention to the rhetoric of it only, and this I doubted whether Lysias himself would consider adequate. If you will let me say so, Phaedrus, it seemed to me he said the same things over twice or thrice, perhaps because he wasn't very well supplied with things to say on a given subject, or perhaps he didn't bother about a point like that. And then it seemed to me that he was showing off in youthful fashion how well he could say the same thing over in two different ways.
>
> PHAEDRUS: Nonsense, Socrates! What you call repetition is the peculiar merit of the speech. . . .[4]

The speech of Lysias is in fact a tediously overlapping enumeration of reasons against the eager lover and in favor of the person who is more calculating in his approach, or, as he is called, the "non-lover." At a later point in the argument (264) Socrates likens it to an inscription that was said to appear on the tomb of Midas the Phrygian. Any line of it could be put first or last.

> A bronze maiden am I; and I am placed upon the tomb of Midas.
> So long as water runs and tall trees put forth leaves,
> Remaining in this very spot upon a much lamented tomb,
> I shall declare to passers by that Midas is buried here.

Some of the distortions of style which the basically careless structure of thought has forced upon the writer—the "two different ways" of saying the same thing to which Socrates alluded—may be more apparent in the Greek than in English translations where efforts of translators to tidy up have missed the point.

> For lovers repent (*ekeinois . . . metamelei*) of the kindnesses they have done when their passion ceases; but there is no time when non-lovers naturally repent (*metagnōnai prosēkei*).—231

Here the translator's logical repetition of *repent* covers up the pointless "elegant variation" of the Greek. The following example is more faithful to the Greek text.

> And besides, lovers consider the *injury they have done to their own concerns* on account of their love, and the benefits they have conferred, and they add *the trouble they have had*, . . . ;

[4] *Phaedrus* 234–5. We quote the translation by Professor Lane Cooper, *Phaedrus, Ion, Gorgias* (London, 1938), p. 15, by permission of the Oxford University Press, Inc., New York.

> but non-lovers cannot aver *neglect of their own affairs* because of their condition, nor can they take account of the *pains they have been at in the past.*—231

The italicized phrases tease a very simple meaning into coy but drab variations. The gist of the matter is that this is a bad speech, and that it is badly written. And both these things are true, implies Socrates, because the author does not know what he is talking about.

The next step in the dramatically conceived argument is accomplished by a second speech on the same theme—one delivered by Socrates, *ex tempore*, with his head wrapped up for shame, in the character of a crafty lover who tries to gain favors by pretending to be a non-lover. It is a better speech than the first, because it begins with a definition of love (as desire) and proceeds, in a style which is at least orderly, to expound the evil of being ruled by that force. Socrates even makes a pretense of being in a kind of dithyrambic frenzy and winds up his speech with a hexameter.[5] But the whole argument is negative, at the expense of the lover, and stops without saying a word in actual favor of the non-lover—because, of course, nothing can be said in his favor. Whereas the first speech and the critique of it has suggested the union or even identity of bad, ignorant thinking and bad style, the second speech exhibits the severe handicap imposed upon himself by the person who in a sense knows the truth but who pretends not to know it—and leads "his hearers on with sportive words" (262).

Almost immediately Socrates is stricken with remorse at having participated in a blasphemy and, in the manner of a man who not only knows the truth but is inspired to speak in its defence, launches into his palinode, the prolonged and eloquent allegorical discourse upon love, beauty, and immortality to which we have already alluded. Despite its enthusiasm and lavish invention, the speech is well ordered, beginning with a fourfold celebration of *mania* (244–245) or inspired madness and pursuing the theme of the soul's immortality in the figure of the charioteer and his two horses. This figure itself might be taken as a symbol of orderly composition and division.

The rhetorical significance of the three speeches on love becomes unmistakable in the comparison of their merits and the theoretical discussion which follows.

> But I do think you will agree to this, that every discourse must be organised, like a living being, with a body of its own, as it were, so as not to be headless or footless, but to have a middle and members, composed in fitting relation to each other and to the whole.—264

[5] *Phaedrus* 238, 241. Aristotle is apparently thinking of these passages when in his *Rhetoric* (III, 7) he alludes to the ironic use of emotive language in the *Phaedrus*.

The second speech of Socrates is described apologetically as figurative, plausible, perhaps expressive of some truth—a "sportive jest."

> . . . but in these chance utterances were involved two principles, the essence of which it would be gratifying to learn, if art could teach it.
>
> PHAEDRUS: What principles?
>
> SOCRATES: That of perceiving and bringing together in one idea the scattered particulars, that one may make clear by definition the particular thing which he wishes to explain; just as now, in speaking of love, we said what he is and defined it whether well or ill. Certainly by this means the discourse acquired clearness and consistency.
>
> PHAEDRUS: And what is the other principle, Socrates?
>
> SOCRATES: That of dividing things by classes; where the natural joints are, and not trying to break any part, after the manner of a bad carver.—265.
>
> Now I myself, Phaedrus, am a lover of these processes of division and bringing together, as aids to speech and thought; and if I think any other man is able to see things that can naturally be collected into one and divided into many, him I follow after and "walk in his footsteps as if he were a god." And whether the name I give to those who can do this is right or wrong, God knows, but I have called them hitherto dialecticians.—266

In short, rhetoric, so far as it is anything at all but a sham, is philosophy. To be able to define and divide, the rhetorician has to be able to think; he has to know the truth. There would seem to be some hedging on the part of Plato in this dialogue—as to whether the truth to be known is the cognitive content, the doctrine, about which the rhetorician would persuade his hearers, or another kind of truth, the psychological truth about their individual temperaments, which he must know if his discourse is to be a successfully administered persuasion (*psuchagōgia*).—271.

> He must understand the nature of the soul, must find out the the class of speech adapted to each nature, and must arrange and adorn his discourse accordingly, offering to the complex soul elaborate and harmonious discourses, and simple tales to the simple soul.—277.

But the emphasis of the dialogue is very largely upon the question *what* is to be said, not upon the question *to whom*, and the chief distinction is between the politico-legal rhetorician, who prefers "what

seems to be true," or what is probable, to actual truth, and the philosophic rhetorician, who labors "not for the sake of speaking and acting before men, but that he may be able to speak and to do everything, so far as possible, in a manner pleasing to the gods." (273) In short, the main distinction is between professional rhetoricians as they are actually found to be, and the ideal rhetorician as he may be conceived to be. And here the Socratic identification of virtue with knowledge works relentlessly. If he who knows what is right will always do it, then he who does wrong (a sophistical rhetorician who uses his "art" to work evil) cannot know the right—or at least the so-called "art" by which he works evil cannot be a way of knowing it. As in the *Ion* the retreat was ironically from poetry as an art or form of knowledge to poetry as divine insanity (and indeed the same retreat occurs in the *Phaedrus* on several planes of irony and seriousness), so the specific resort imputed to rhetoric (a close relative of poetry) is from artful knowledge to the cheapness of a knack or trick (*tribē*). That is the only way to explain its undoubtedly effective, but subversive, performance.

> I seem, as it were, to hear some arguments approaching and protesting that . . . ["the art of speaking"] is lying and is not an art, but a craft devoid of art (*hoti pseudetai kai ouk esti technē all' atechnos tribē*). A real art of speaking . . . which does not seize hold of truth, does not exist and never will.—260

This explanation had been given a fancier (and no doubt to the rhetoricians an even more exasperating) shape in the earlier *Gorgias*, where the same key concept, *tribē* or knack, is applied in a four-point analogy. As the cheap knack of *cosmetic* is to the art of *gymnastic* in building health, and as *cookery* is to *medicine* in repairing health, so in the field of politics, *sophistic* is the meretricious rival of *legislation*, and *rhetoric* is that of *jurisprudence*.

At one place in the *Phaedrus* (267), Socrates makes a scornful review of contemporary rhetoricians and the niceties of their art (*ta kompsa tēs technēs*): Theodorus of Byzantium, with his introduction, narrative, testimony, proofs, probability, confirmation and further confirmation, refutation and further refutation; the "illustrious Parian" Evenus, with his covert allusion, indirect praises (*parepainoi*), and indirect censures (*parapsogoi*); Gorgias and Tisias, who make small things seem great and great things small, and new things old and old things new, and who invented conciseness (*suntomia logōn*) and measureless length on all subjects (*apeira mēkē peri pantōn*); Prodicus and Hippias of Elis; Polus, with his duplication (*diplasiologia*), sententiousness (*gnōmologia*), and figurativeness (*eikonologia*); Licymnius, with his beautiful diction (*euepeia*); Protagoras, with his correctness of diction (*orthoepeia*); the "mighty Chalcedonian" Thrasymachus, with his genius

for rousing audiences to wrath and for soothing them again, for devising or for refuting calumnies on any grounds whatsoever. On one piece of technique, that of summarizing a speech at the end, all seem to be agreed, though some call it recapitulation (*epanodos*), others something else. This is a section of the *Phaedrus* which might be transplanted almost verbatim into Benedetto Croce's expressionistic history of *Aesthetic*.

The ground of Plato's objection to rhetoric may be perhaps most deeply understood, near the end of the *Phaedrus*, in a distinction between written and spoken words, a distinction which is the more relevant to the argument because of the fact that Attic oratory made no pretense of being *ex tempore*. The written word, urges Socrates, is a static thing useful only to tell people what they already know, an amusement, a reminder for the forgetfulness of old age. But the spoken word is the true, vital, and dialectic word—it is written in the mind of the hearer and is able to defend itself in the process of question and answer.

> But the man who thinks that in the written word there is necessarily much that is playful, and that no written discourse, whether in metre or in prose, deserves to be treated very seriously (and this applies also to the recitations of the rhapsodes, delivered to sway people's minds, without opportunity for questioning and teaching), but that the best of them really serve only to remind us of what we know; and who thinks that only in words about justice and beauty and goodness spoken by teachers for the sake of instruction and really written in a soul is clearness and perfection and serious value, that such words should be considered the speaker's own legitimate offspring, first the word within himself, if it be found there, and secondly its descendants or brothers which may have sprung up in worthy manner in the souls of others, and who pays no attention to the other words,—that man, Phaedrus, is likely to be such as you and I might pray that we ourselves may become. —277–8 [6]

In this clear confirmation of the anti-mimetic doctrine of the *Republic*, we may see that in theory at least (or at least in this dialogue) Plato prefers the object imitated in his dialogues, the actual conversations as they may be supposed to have taken place, to his own highly artful or poetic embodiment of them in fixed words. And this may remind us that poetic quality does indeed reside in fixity, or determinacy, of words. Not only meter and rhyme and all the minute effects of a lyric but the

[6] Cf. Atkins, I, 148 on the niceties possible in written style and on the "deliberative" oratorical style as shadow-painting (*skiagraphia*).

dialogue and succession of scenes in a tragedy, the whole economy and precision of poetic power in words, depend on choice, limitation, and fixation, and hence are opposed to the fluid character of dialectic or of the bull session—though the latter, in virtue of its capacity to shift words, correct, repeat, rephrase, paraphrase, and in general adjust itself to the exigencies of debate, may in a sense fit closer to the truth of the matter which is discussed.

IV

IT WAS no less against literary than against oratorical interests that Plato was fighting. The close alliance of rhetoric and poetry as his enemies, seen more than once in the *Phaedrus*,[7] is suggested a final time in a closing allusion to the rhetorician Isocrates.

> I think he has a nature above the speeches of Lysias and possesses a nobler character; so that I should not be surprised if, as he grows older, he should so excel in his present studies that all who have ever treated of rhetoric shall seem less than children; and I suspect that these studies will not satisfy him, but a more divine impulse will lead him to greater things; for my friend, something of philosophy is inborn in his mind.—279

The fictional date of the dialogue is about 410 B.C., when Isocrates, the pupil of Gorgias, was making his first appearance on the scene. But the dialogue was written perhaps as late as 370,[8] at a time when Isocrates was the most eminent and affluent teacher of rhetoric at Athens and hence the chief rhetorical antagonist of the Platonic school. The *Art of Rhetoric* which Isocrates wrote survives only in a few fragments. But from several of his discourses, especially that *Against the Sophists* and the *Antidosis*, which deal with education—and from the style itself of his writing—we get an idea of the kind of campaign which he waged against law-court and assembly rhetoric and the debased form of ethical dialectic which he calls "eristic." Although he discountenanced the academic exercise on mythological topics or on paradoxical themes such as those affected by Gorgias and Protagoras—"that we cannot lie," or "that nothing exists"—or on such anticipations of Swift's broomstick as "humble bees" or "salt," the theory of Isocrates was literary rather than practically oratorical. The form of speech which he chiefly sponsored was the epideictic (the encomiastic or the invective declamation), and this was an oratory that had moved as far as possible away from the give and take of dialectic toward the fixity of a set piece or essay—

[7] See for instance, 258, 261.
[8] R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 1952), pp. 3–8.

albeit an essay that would seem by our standards a rather florid one. The epideictic style, Aristotle would say in his *Rhetoric* (III, 12), is especially suited to written compositions; it aims at being read. Isocrates hoped that his *Antidosis* would prove a "monument more noble than statues of bronze." The rhetoric of Isocrates was a scheme of general education (*paideia*) which aimed at a liberal union of philosophy and persuasion, an understanding of elevated and large political topics, and withal an artistic verbal style, imaginative (*poiētikos*) and diverse. The "thoughts" of the graduate rhetorician were to be not only "dignified and original" but "adorned with a number of striking figures." What was desired was a kind of poetic prose oratory, or literary prose, something which would serve not only for statesmen but for critics of poetry, for historians, for writers of panegyric. Isocrates entertained a highly integrated view of life and letters; he conceived the former as greatly in need of the latter. The sum of his teaching was a genial, flowery, belletristic kind of humanism.[9]

V

THIS was one kind of answer both to the Sophists and to Plato. A rhetorician of later antiquity[1] reports that Aristotle's systematic treatise on the question, his *Rhetoric* in three books, was the outcome of a feud with Isocrates. The story says that during his first residence in Athens (367–347 B.C.) Aristotle sneered at the ideas of Isocrates and the method of their dissemination in bundles of speeches hawked by the booksellers. Yet the difference between the two as theorists of rhetoric is not so profound. Aristotle takes more examples from the orations of Isocrates than from the works of any other author. The difference between them might be summed up, without great distortion, in the statement that Aristotle, looking on rhetoric in a far more utilitarian way than Isocrates, is somewhat closer to being sophistical; as a philosopher, however, as a teacher of rhetoric in Plato's Academy, he is at the same time more systematic than Isocrates. The latter virtue is the one by which Aristotle gains the advantage of having his ideas preserved not in speeches but in a treatise.[2]

"Do you think we have reproached the art of speaking too harshly?" asks Socrates in the *Phaedrus*. "Perhaps she might say:

> 'Why do you talk such nonsense, you strange men? I do not compel anyone to learn to speak without knowing the truth,

[9] See Atkins, I, 124–8, 148, 154–5.

[1] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Isocrates* 18; Atkins, I, 133.

[2] Aristotle's *Theodectia*, on style, and other works on rhetoric are lost. Atkins, I, 133, 135, 136.

> but if my advice is of any value, he learns that first and then acquires me. So what I claim is this, that without my help the knowledge of the truth does not give the art of persuasion.'—260

It would not be unfair to say that Plato has here anticipated the gist of Aristotle's doctrine. "What makes the sophist," says Aristotle, "is not skill in argument, but [defect of] moral purpose." [3]

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* opens with the statement: "Rhetoric is a counterpart of dialectic." But the term *dialectic* has for Aristotle a softer meaning than for Plato—the meaning of a conversationally plausible inquiry rather than of a metaphysically compelling demonstration. Dialectic is a comfortable neighbor to rhetoric, on the higher side. Both dialectic and its practical counterpart, rhetoric, enjoy a kind of cushioning from the severity of theoretical science (mathematics, physics, metaphysics). Dialectic is the argumentative technique of the social, practical, deliberative and "alternative" sciences (ethics and politics). "It is the mark of an educated man" says Aristotle in his *Ethics*, "to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is . . . equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs." [4]

Even that much would have been enough to protect rhetoric from the full brunt of the Platonic inquisition. But Aristotle does more. There is a moment in the first chapter of Book I when he seems bent on treating rhetoric rather rigorously within the limits of its probable arguments (its "examples" and "enthymemes"). [5] "Proofs," he says, "are the only things in . . . [rhetoric] that come within the province of art." And he is severe upon the previous compilers of handbooks who have devoted their attention chiefly to methods of arousing prejudice. Nevertheless, the argument begins to change even in the same chapter; there is a disposition to talk more about persuasion than about proof. The truth may be the truth, but it may need help before it is accepted. Not all persons are easy to persuade by reason. The orator should be able to prove opposites—like a logician—not for the sake of doing this,

[3] *Ho gar sophistikos ouk en tē dunamei all' en tē proairesei* (*Rhetoric*, I, 1).

[4] *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 3.

[5] The term "enthymeme" was used by Aristotle's successors, as it is by modern logicians, to refer to the elliptical syllogism. But for Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric* and in his logical writings, "enthymeme" is the name of the rhetorical syllogism, which is a *probable* argument for a *particular* conclusion. The enthymeme is thus distinguishable from two other kinds of syllogism, the dialectic syllogism, which is a probable argument for a general conclusion, and the apodeictic or scientific syllogism, which is a certain argument for a universal conclusion. See J. H. Freese, *Aristotle . . . the "Art" of Rhetoric* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1939), p. 474, Glossary, s.v. *Dialektikē;* James H. McBurney, "Some Recent Interpretations of the Aristotelian Enthymeme," *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters,* XXI (Ann Arbor, 1936), 489–500.

but just for understanding. All good things except virtue itself may be abused. The function of rhetoric is not so much to persuade as to find out the existing means of persuasion. Thus runs what would seem to be almost the dialogue of Aristotle with his own conscience, as he moves toward the empirical and anti-Platonic procedure of justifying rhetoric as it is found in fact to be. The second chapter begins by "defining rhetoric anew." "Rhetoric then may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever." And we learn in this chapter that there are no fewer than four kinds of "artificial proof" [6] or means of persuasion: (1) the ethical or those depending on the moral character of the orator himself —by which he elicits confidence in himself; (2) the affective or those which appeal to the emotions of the audience (It was only the *exclusive* use of such proofs to which I alluded disparagingly in my first chapter, he explains); (3) valid arguments, which tend to establish the truth of whatever we are maintaining; and (4) apparent arguments, which only seem to establish it. The first two books of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* do in fact proceed in that pattern, the first Book telling about materials, or areas of argumentative probability, the second Book giving us mainly the psychology of good relations between speaker and audience. Aristotle has put a four-layered mattress between rhetoric and the inexorable or scientific truth—two of the layers being psychological, that is, relating to the character and feelings of the speaker and audience, one, the layer of probable cognitive arguments being at least nonscientific, and the fourth, the layer of apparent arguments, being feathered with actual deception. Aristotle thus defends rhetoric on approximately the same grounds as those on which Plato condemns it.

These Aristotelian graduations away from the strictness of scientific demonstration are not the immediate stuff for a rhetoric of verbal surface. But they do provide the underlying contour of such a rhetoric. They enable or make plausible a fifth and a sixth graduation—verbal style (*lexis*) and structure or architecture (*taxis*), the subjects of Aristotle's third book. About Aristotle's conception of *taxis* Plato could not have complained, though he might have related this (the organic order, beginning, middle, and end named in the *Phaedrus*) more intimately to "dialectic." But *lexis* is the apex and epitome of the difference between Plato and Aristotle as rhetoricians, and not so much the details of what Aristotle said about *lexis* as the very fact that he thought it reasonable to devote twelve chapters to the topic.

"We have therefore next to speak of style; for it is not sufficient to know what one ought to say,—but one must also know how to say it, and this largely contributes to making the speech appear of a certain

[6] I.e., artful, as distinguished from the inartificial or ready-made, such as witnesses, tortures, contracts.

character" (III, 1). It is almost as if this matter of style should be grouped with the newly acknowledged and even more external art of delivery (a kind of acting, *hupokrisis*), a thing that has to be conceded, not as right but as necessary, owing to the corruption of politicians and judges. Just a little more can be said for style:

> . . . it does make a difference, for the purpose of making a thing clear, to speak in this or that manner; still, the difference is not so very great, . . . all these things are mere outward show for pleasing the hearer; wherefore no one teaches geometry in this way.[7] III, 1

It is a cautiously divided account of style, giving due recognition to clarity and purity (*esti d' archē tēs lexeōs to hellēnizein*—the first principle of style is to use good Greek[8]) and in general to propriety, but at the same time showing considerable respect for the elevated and ornate, for a certain strangeness or departure from the ordinary which (like a foreigner among our fellow citizens) appears more distinguished (III, 2 and 5).

One of the most interesting technical features[9] of the discussion is a marked concern for metaphor. The section of his *Poetics* (Chs. XXI–XXIV) devoted to the element of tragedy which Aristotle calls diction or style, *lexis*, is mentioned four times in the first two chapters of Book III of the *Rhetoric*. If we turn back to the *Poetics*, we find the often-quoted statement that to be a master of metaphor is the greatest poetic gift, because metaphor shows an eye for resemblances, and metaphor cannot be learnt from anyone else.[1] We find also the definition: "Metaphor consists in assigning to a thing the name of something else," and the four classes of metaphoric reference: from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, and by propor-

[7] He continues: ". . . . written speeches owe their effect not so much to the sense as to the style. The poets, as was natural, were the first to give an impulse to style; for words are imitations, and the voice also, which of all our parts is best adapted for imitation, was ready to hand; thus the arts of the rhapsodists, actors, and others, were fashioned. And as the poets, although their utterances were devoid of sense, appeared to have gained their reputation through their style, it was a poetical style that first came into being, as that of Gorgias." In the *Poetics* (XXIV) appears the rather frigid statement: "The diction should be elaborated in the pauses of the action, where there is no expression of character and thought. For . . . character and thought are merely obscured by a diction that is over brilliant."

[8] Under this head comes a censure of ambiguity (*amphiboloi*), III, 5.

[9] The statements in III, 8 that prose should have rhythm but not meter (*rhythmon dei echein tōn logōn, metron de mē*) and that the best rhythm for prose is the paeonic, are Aristotle's attempt to reconcile the Pythagorean and Platonic doctrine that number confers order and limit (see the literary application in *Philebus* 23) with the fact that the "rhythm" or movement of good prose is not really a matter of number or measure.

[1] A thought repeated in *Rhetoric* III, 2.

tion.[2] Somewhat more specific, if miscellaneous, remarks on the same subject appear in the *Rhetoric*. "It is metaphor above all that gives perspicuity, pleasure, and a foreign air" (III, 2). "It must be appropriate and not far-fetched," but not too obvious either (III, 11). It can make things look either better or worse—as when a pirate calls himself a "purveyor" or an actor calls himself an artist, or someone else calls the actor a flatterer of Dionysus. A metaphor is like a riddle. Metaphors should mostly be "derived from things that are beautiful." "It does make a difference, for instance, whether one says 'rosy-fingered morn,' rather than 'purple-fingered,' or, what is still worse, 'red-fingered'" (III, 2). A climax to these obiter dicta and to the whole treatment of *lexis* occurs in Chapters 10 and 11, where metaphor is joined with figures of parallel sound and sense and with various verbal deceptions or jokes shading into paronomasia or pun.

> "And he strode on, under his feet—chilblains," whereas the hearer thought he was going to say "sandals."
>
> The more special qualities the expression possesses, the smarter it appears; for instance, if the words contain a metaphor, and a metaphor of a special kind, antithesis, and equality of clauses, and actuality.

"Actuality" or vividness (*energeia*)[3] is perhaps better taken as a term for summing up the effect of rhetorical figures than as a name for another figure on the same footing. But we may say that Aristotle has here very shrewdly observed a close relation among rhetorical features which are not always or easily seen as so closely related—the logic of parallel and distinction, the apparently alien pun or trick with sounds, and mediating these extremes the imaginative force of metaphor. He has thus come not far from supplying an accurate formula for a long tradition of poetical wit.

> Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom
> Of foreign Tyrants and of Nymphs at home;
> Here thou, great ANNA! whom three realms obey,
> Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes Tea.

[2] Proportion is defined in *Ethics* V, 3 as "an equality of ratios, implying four terms at least." See *Rhetoric* III, 4: "If the goblet is the shield of Dionysus, then the shield may properly be called the goblet of Ares."

[3] Roman rhetoricians (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *De Lysia*, VII; Longinus, *Peri Hupsous*, XV; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* VIII, 3, 62) use the term *enargeia* in approximately the same sense. Cf. W. Rhys Roberts, *Longinus on the Sublime* (Cambridge, 1935), pp. 197–8.

VI

THE important thing about both Aristotle and Isocrates as rhetoricians is, in brief, that they affirm the power of the word—Aristotle the more systematically and analytically, Isocrates the more eloquently. This is the point at which to make a brief return to Isocrates for the sake of introducing some of his enthusiastic conceptions. According to Isocrates eloquence is creative process (*poiētikon pragma*), the source of civilization, of laws and arts, and of most other human blessings, the mark which distinguishes men from the brutes, the instrument and test of wisdom. It is the adorner and transformer of experience, making old things new and new things old, the big little and the little big. It is an expression of intelligence, a reflection of character, an outward image of a true and virtuous soul (*psuchēs agathēs kai pistēs eidōlon*).[4] The rhetorical doctrine made current by Isocrates had been heard before from sophists and much earlier had had a more lyric orientation, as in the myth of Orpheus taming savage men and beasts by his music, and that of Amphion charming stones with his poetry and building the Theban walls.[5] It had been aligned with such verbal and poetic interests as the allegorical interpretation of Homer rejected by Plato in Book III of the *Republic* or the semi-facetious etymological reasoning about the right sense of words, the natural relation between words and things, in Plato's *Cratylus*. The Stoic Zeno's *Homeric Problems* would later establish the school of allegorical criticism for the post-Aristotelian or Hellenistic age;[6] the natural expressiveness of language would be defended by the school of Analogists among the Alexandrian grammarians and critics.[7] A commonplace of antiquity, especially among the Stoic philosophers,[8] was a doctrine which we may call simply that of the *Logos*—the word as the expression and hence the mold and determination of reason and intelligence: in a mathematical sense, as in the logos of Euclid, in grammatical, etymological, symbolic, exegetic, rhetorical, and moral senses—in the grand and synthesizing sense that eloquence and wisdom are inseparable. The relation of this doctrine to literary criticism may be hinted by allusion to the earliest extant Greek *Grammar*, the sixteen pages of the second-century Dionysius Thrax, a standard for centuries, in which we ascend through six stages, from accurate reading aloud and interpretation of figures of speech, to the crown of

[4] *Against the Sophists* 12; *Nicocles* 5–9; *Antidosis* 254; *Panegyricus* 8; all cited in Atkins, I, 125–6.

[5] Atkins, I, 13, 29, 127.

[6] Atkins, I, 187.

[7] Atkins, I, 184; II, 17.

[8] E. Vernon Arnold, *Roman Stoicism* (Cambridge, 1911), esp. pp. 128–49.

all, the criticism of poetry. The *Grammaticus* of this age was scarcely the figure for a mid-19th-century *Grammarian's Funeral.* He was the professionally qualified *poetarum interpres.*[9] Finally, the doctrine of the *Logos* with all that it implied was a doctrine less dear even to poets and grammarians than to statesmen. It was one of the main theoretical supports of a life devoted to public leadership. "I am grateful to the Stoics," said Cicero, "for this reason: that they alone of all the philosophers have declared eloquence to be virtue and wisdom."[1] The debate about rhetoric which we have been considering is but an early chapter, though an important one, of a controversial history which continues through later antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. The ancient quarrel between the philosophers and the poets to which Plato alludes in the *Republic* was the same in principle as a later and much longer quarrel between dialecticians (in the Platonic sense, philosophers tending toward science) and rhetoricians.[2] On the side of the dialecticians one might align in one consistent team: Plato, Abelard, Occam, Ramus, Descartes. On the side of the rhetoricians, poets and grammarians: Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, Augustine,[3] John of Salisbury, Bonaventure, and Richard Hooker.[4] The following retrospective passages in the *De Oratore* of Cicero define the role of Socrates in the long debate and the importance of the whole incident in which Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle were the other chief participants.

> It was Socrates who . . . separated the ability to think wisely from the ability to speak gracefully, though these are naturally united—Socrates! the philosopher whose genius and varied con-

[9] Atkins I, 182–3; J. E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship* (Cambridge, 1921), I, 6–11; Richard McKeon, "The Philosophic Bases of Criticism," in R. S. Crane, *Critics and Criticism,* p. 507.

[1] "*Stoicis hanc habeo gratiam, quod soli ex omnibus eloquentiam virtutem ac sapientiam esse dixerunt*" (quoted in Arnold, *Roman Stoicism,* p. 149). Cf. J. S. Watson, *Cicero on Oratory and Orators,* 1890, p. 210; *De Oratore* III, 18.

[2] The Stoic philosopher Zeno made a comparison (recorded in Cicero's *Orator* XXXII, 113) between the concise form of dialectic utterance, a "closed fist," and the expanded expression of rhetoric, an "open palm." The fact that Stoic philosophers promoted the doctrine of the Logos (or verbal power) but at the same time favored a concise and severe dialectic style must be looked on as an anomaly arising characteristically enough out of the complex issue concerning verbal style and content. Cf. *post* Chapter 12, our account of Ramism and 17th-century rhetoric.

[3] The theological aspect is well illustrated in this passage from the *Adversus Praxean* of Tertullian (about A.D. 213): "This reason is His own thought; this is what the Greeks call 'Logos,' which word we translate also by 'speech.' . . . To understand it more easily, take knowledge from yourself, I pray you, as from 'the image and likeness' of God. . . . See, when you silently meet with yourself in the process of thinking, that this very process goes on within you by reason meeting you along with word at every movement of your thought, at every beat of your understanding. Whatsoever you think is word; whatsoever you understand is speech" (*Tertullian Against Praxeas,* trans. A. Souter, London, 1920, pp. 36–7, Par. 5).

[4] See H. M. McLuhan, "Edgar Poe's Tradition," *Sewanee Review,* LII (January–March, 1944), 24–33.

versation Plato's dialogues have committed to immortality, but who himself has left us nothing in writing. Hence arose that divorce of the tongue from the heart (*discidium illud . . . quasi linguae atque cordis*), that absurd, needless, and deplorable conception, that one set of persons should teach us to think, and another should teach us to speak.—*De Oratore* III, 16

The ancients, till the time of Socrates, used to combine the whole of their study and science pertaining to morality, to the duties of life, to virtue, and to civil government, with the art of speaking; but afterward, the eloquent being separated by Socrates from the philosophic, and the distinction being continued by all the followers of Socrates, the philosophers despised eloquence, and the orators philosophy. . . . the followers of Socrates excluded the pleaders of causes from their own ranks, and from the common title of philosophers—though the ancients had been of the opinion that the faculty of speaking and that of understanding were allied in a marvellous harmony.—*De Oratore* III, 19 [5]

Aristotle . . . said it was disgraceful that he should remain silent and let Isocrates do all the speaking. He therefore undertook to equip that philosophy of his with due illustrations and ornament and to connect the knowledge of things with skill in speaking. This of course came to the notice of that sagacious monarch Philip, who summoned Aristotle as a tutor for his son Alexander. Let the boy get from the same teacher instructions in behavior and in language.

Now, if anybody desires to call that philosopher who instructs us fully in things and words an orator, he may do so without opposition from me; or if he prefers to call that orator whom I describe as having wisdom united with eloquence a philosopher, I shall make no objection. . . . If I had to choose one of the two, I should prefer uneloquent good sense to loquacious folly. But if it be inquired which is the more eminent excellence, I give the palm to the learned orator, and if you will admit that this person is also a philosopher, there is an end of controversy; but if you insist on distinguishing the orator from the philosopher, the philosopher will be inferior—for the equipment of a complete orator includes the knowledge of the philosopher, but the knowledge of the philosopher does not necessarily include the eloquence of the orator.—*De Oratore* III, 35 [6]

[5] Adapted from J. S. Watson, *Cicero on Oratory and Orators* (New York, 1890), pp. 209, 212.

[6] Adapted from J. S. Watson, p. 233.

SUPPLEMENT

This tradition [the oratorical] has been a continuous force in European law, letters, and politics from the time of the Greek sophists. It is most conveniently referred to as the Ciceronian ideal, since Cicero gave it to St. Augustine and St. Jerome, who in turn saw to it that it has never ceased to influence Western society. The Ciceronian ideal as expressed in the *De Oratore* or in St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* is the ideal of rational man reaching his noblest attainment in the expression of an eloquent wisdom. Necessary steps in the attainment of this ideal are careful drill in the poets followed by a program of encyclopedic scope directed to the forensic end of political power. Thus, the *doctus orator* is, explicitly, Cicero's sophistic version of Plato's philosopher-king. This ideal became the basis for hundreds of manuals written by eloquent scholars for the education of monarchs from the fifth century, through John of Salisbury and Vincent of Beauvais, to the famous treatises of Erasmus and Castiglione.

So far as America is concerned, this was a fact of decisive importance, since Virginia, and the South in general, was to receive the permanent stamp of this Ciceronian ideal. . . . It is thus no accident that the creative political figures of American life have been moulded in the South. Whether one considers Jefferson or Lincoln, one is confronted with a mind aristocratic, legalistic, encyclopedic, forensic, habitually expressing itself in the mode of an eloquent wisdom.

New England is in the scholastic tradition, and profoundly opposed to "humanism." Briefly, the theocratic founders of Harvard and rulers of New England were Calvinist divines, fully trained in the speculative theology which had arisen for the first time in the twelfth century—the product of that dialectical method in theology which is rightly associated with Peter Abelard. Unlike Luther and many English Protestants, Calvin and his followers were schoolmen, opposed to the old theology of the Fathers which Erasmus and the humanist-Ciceronians had brought back to general attention after the continuous predominance of scholastic theology since the twelfth century. To the humanists nobody could be a true interpreter of Scripture, a true exponent of the *philosophi Christi*, who had not had a full classical training. So Catholic and Protestant schoolmen alike, were, for these men, the "barbarians," the "Goths of the Sorbonne," corrupting with "modernistic" trash (the schoolmen were called the *moderni* from the first) the eloquent piety and wisdom of the Fathers. (The Fathers were called the "ancients" or *antiqui theologi.*)

Harvard . . . originated as a little Sorbonne, where in 1650 the scholastic methods of Ockham and Calvin, as streamlined by Petrus Ramus, were the staple of education. Logic and dialectics were the basis of theological method, as of everything else at Harvard. Here rhetoric was taught, not for eloquence, but in order to teach the young seminarian how to rub off the cosmetic tropes of Scripture before going to work on the doctrine with dialectical dichotomies. Ramus taught a utilitarian logic for which he made the same claims as

pragmatists do for "scientific method." In fact, Peirce, James, and Dewey could never have been heard of had they not been nurtured in the Speculative tradition of the scholastic theologians Calvin and Ramus.

—H. M. McLuhan, "Edgar Poe's Tradition," *The Sewanee Review*, LII (January–March, 1944), 25–8, selected passages, by permission of the author and *The Sewanee Review*

Until Gutenberg, poetic publication meant the reading or singing of one's poems to a small audience. When poetry began to exist primarily on the printed page, in the seventeenth century, there occurred that strange mixture of sight and sound later known as "metaphysical poetry" which has so much in common with modern poetry.

The printed page was itself a highly specialized (and spatialized) form of communication. In 1500 A.D. it was revolutionary. And Erasmus was perhaps the first to grasp the fact that the revolution was going to occur above all in the classroom. He devoted himself to the production of text-books and to the setting up of grammar schools. The printed book soon liquidated two thousand years of manuscript culture. It created the solitary student. It set up the rule of private interpretation against public disputation. It established the divorce between "literature and life."

We have long been accustomed to the notion that a person's beliefs shape and color his existence. They provide the windows which frame, and through which he views, all events. We are less accustomed to the notion that the shapes of a technological environment are also idea-windows. Every shape (gimmick or metropolis), every situation planned and realized by man's factive intelligence, is a window which reveals or distorts reality. Today when power technology has taken over the entire global environment to be manipulated as the material of art, nature has disappeared with nature-poetry.

From the point of view of its format, the press as a daily cross-section of the globe is a mirror of the technological instruments of communication. It is the popular daily book, the great collective poem, the universal entertainment of our age. As such it has modified poetic techniques and in turn has already been modified by the newer media of movie, radio, and television. These represent revolutions in communication as radical as printing itself.

James Joyce was the first to seize upon newspaper, radio, movie, and television to set up his "verbivocovisual" drama in *Finnegan's Wake*. Pound and Eliot are, in comparison with Joyce, timid devotees of the book as art form.

In cognition we have to interiorize the exterior world. We have to recreate in the medium of our senses and inner faculties the drama of existence. This is the work of the *logos poietikos*, the agent intellect. In speech we utter that drama which we have analogously re-created within us. In speech we make or *poet* the world even as we may say that the movie parrots the world. Languages themselves are thus the greatest of all works of art. They are the collective hymns to existence. For in cognition itself is the whole of the poetic process. But the artist differs from most men in his power to arrest and then reverse the stages of human apprehension. He learns how to embody

the stages of cognition (Aristotle's "plot") in an exterior work which can be held up for contemplation.

It is only common sense to recognize that the general situation created by a communicative channel and its audience is a large part of that in which and by which the individuals commune. The encoded message cannot be regarded as a mere capsule or pellet introduced at one point and consumed at another. Communication is communication all along the line. One might illustrate from sports. The best brand of football played before fifty people would lack something of the power to communicate.

What we have to defend today is not the values developed in any particular culture or by any one mode of communication. Modern technology presumes to attempt a total transformation of man and his environment. This calls in turn for an inspection and defense of all human values. And so far as merely human aid goes, the citadel of this defense must be located in analytical awareness of the nature of the creative process involved in human cognition. For it is in this citadel that science and technology have already established themselves in their manipulation of the new media.

—H. M. McLuhan, "Sight, Sound and the Fury," *The Commonweal*, LX (April 9, 1954), 7–11, selected passages, by permission of the author and *The Commonweal*

CHAPTER 5

ROMAN CLASSICISM: HORACE

§ *Hellenistic criticism—II. the context of the* Ars Poetica *—III. its meaning: literary genres, Platonic forms, Aristotelian decorum, formulas and examples, imitation of models—IV. nature and convention, the audience—V. theory and practice in Horace, a modern problem: imperfection vs. objectivity—VI. (literary ideas in the* Satires *and other* Epistles) *satire and comedy as poetry, the language of poetry, usage, the* callida junctura*—VII. mediocrity in poems—VIII. the structure of the* Ars Poetica, *Peripatetic topics: matter and form, hedonism and didacticism, poet and poem, divine inspiration, genius and technique—IX. Augustan studio advice* §

MORE THAN TWO CENTURIES OF HELLENISTIC CIVILIZATION LIE between Aristotle and the literary theorist who is next to claim our attention, the Roman poet Horace. This period, during which we hear of literary studies no longer in Athens, but in the capital of the Attalids at Pergamum and in that of the Ptolemies at Alexandria, is not celebrated for important literary theory. The reason is, in one sense, simply that the writings have disappeared. The history has to be pieced out inferentially from titles of lost works, from later writers like the geographer Strabo, the biographer Plutarch, or the encyclopedist Diogenes Laertius, and from certain very recently recovered papyrus fragments. Yet the reason for the paucity of documents in turn would seem to be that the Hellenistic period produced no literary theory which could compare in seriousness with that of the fourth century in Athens and no literary art which could compare with that of the Periclean or that of the Homeric age. It is a period known for historically rigorous studies, formalism, and technicalities, and at the same

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time for extreme aestheticism, literary novelties, and *préciosité*. It is known for genre naturalism and at the same time for romantic fantasy. It was the heyday not only of the grammarian, the scholiast, the philologist, but also of the epigrammatist, the idyllist, the "Asiatic" rhetorician.[1] The communal interest in religious and patriotic issues which during more ancient times had produced the great genres of drama and epic dwindled during the Hellenistic age to an esoteric and merely literary cultivation of smaller forms—epigram, elegy, idyll, pastoral, didactic, epyllion. Scholar poets developed the utmost nicety in exploring the byways of myth. When Apollonius of Rhodes published about the middle of the third century the four books of his romance epic *Argonautica*, his former instructor Callimachus, the epigrammatist and scholar, led the critics of the day in censure of its long-windedness. "I hate the cyclic poem," said Callimachus, "the common road which everyone uses." And he said also: "a big book is a big nuisance" (*mega biblion mega kakon*).[2] The portrait of the age on the historico-critical side can be suggested in the production by Callimachus of the massive bio-bibliographical catalogue of the Alexandrian Library, *Lists of Illustrious Writers and Their Works*, in 120 volumes.[3] The century is celebrated for the editing and textual criticism of Homer and of the dramatists and lyric poets, the most learned laborers in this field having been Zenodotus (325–234 B.C.), the first librarian of the Alexandrian Museum, and his later contemporaries Eratosthenes, Aristophanes of Byzantium, and Aristarchus. Aristarchus, who centuries later was to be known as the first "critic" in antiquity (the antitype of Aristotle's equally eponymous contemporary the snarling critic Zoilus), earned his fame by a program of studying Homer in the light of the Homeric age, dialect, and idiom. In place of the allegorical or symbolic defence (still employed by the Stoics in the tradition of Zeno), he introduced the concepts of racial childhood, the naively heroic, and the poet as their faithful reporter.[4] Another way of summing up the Alexandrian period in polite letters is to say that it was one of tension between history and criticism, a prolonged Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns, which, even dimly known as it is, forecasts some of the main issues of much later critical history.

[1] Hegesias of Magnesia, who flourished about the middle of the third century, was the champion of the oratorical school known to modern scholars as the First Sophistic.

[2] Atkins, I, 177–9.

[3] Of the same order were a treatise *On Comedy* in eleven books by Lycophron and *The Old Attic Comedy* in twelve volumes by Eratosthenes. The forty-volume *History* of the Graeco-Roman world by Polybius (c. 210–125 B.C.) was a pioneer effort to trace philosophic, political, and social causes.

[4] During the same century Euhemerus of Messina maintained that the Homeric gods were apotheosized primitive benefactors of mankind—and thus gave his name to the "euhemeristic" tradition of mythic interpretation.

II

AT THE death of Theophrastus in 287 B.C., the texts of Aristotle's works are said to have passed to a disciple who hid them from the bibliomania of the Attalid kings in a cave at Scepsis in the Troad. There they lay unknown until about 100 B.C., when they were taken back to Athens. From Athens they were taken by the Roman general Marius to Rome in 86 B.C.[5] The Peripatetics meanwhile carried on in their own fashion, formalizing and fixing the system which Aristotle had sketched. One of these was Neoptolemus, a grammarian-poet of Parium in Bithynia, whose name is connected with that of Horace by the scholiast Porphyrio in the third century A.D. Horace, says Porphyrio in his introductory note to the classic *Ars Poetica*, "epitomized the precepts (*congessit praecepta*) of Neoptolemus of Parium—or at least the most important of them." The assertion has been verified in modern times by the recovery at Herculaneum of some charred papyrus scraps containing a partial digest of Neoptolemus in passages from a work *On Poems* (*Peri Poiēmatōn*) by a first-century Epicurean philosopher Philodemus of Gadara.[6] The connection with Horace is made biographically plausible by the fact that the papyri were recovered from the villa of Lucius Piso Caesonius, Roman consul in 58 B.C. and father of Lucius Calpurnius Piso, who in turn was consul in 15 B.C. and father of the two young men to whom Horace addressed his epistle on the art of writing. It has been easy for historians to imagine the youthful Horace as member of a literary coterie attending the "garden school" at Naples, where Philodemus was a professor, or gathering at the Herculanean villa of the consul Caesonius to discuss with Philodemus the opposed philosophies of Peripatetic utilitarianism and Epicureanism.

The *Epistola ad Pisones* (in the next century dubbed *Ars Poetica* by Quintilian, VIII, 3) is a slick piece of writing, produced by Horace apparently toward the end of his life (65–8 B.C.) after he was the established author of the four books of *Odes*, one of *Epodes*, two of *Satires*, and two of *Epistles*. The whole poetic career of Horace is part of an Augustan and patriotic reaction against Alexandrian belletristic trends and at the same time against Patrician antiquarianism. But there is a great difference in ethical and metaphysical resonance between the *Ars* of Horace and the *Poetics* of Aristotle or the *Phaedrus* of Plato.

[5] Atkins, I, 167. The authorities are Strabo, *Geography* XIII, 1; Plutarch, *Life of Sulla;* Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, chapters on Aristotle and Theophrastus.

[6] Atkins, I, 170; II, 54; and L. P. Wilkinson, *Horace and His Lyric Poetry* (Cambridge, 1945), pp. 87 ff. The work of Philodemus *On Poems* appears in the edition of C. Jensen, *Philodemos über die Gedichte (fünftes Buch)*, Berlin, 1923.

In the rugged days of the Republic, when high political aims governed taste in literature, Cicero had said: "If I had twice as long to live, I should have no time to read lyric poetry." [7] And the soldier dictator Caesar had said: "Avoid a curious word as you would a rock." [8] But Horace practised his art in the day of aristocratic and imperial patronage and polish, when there was need not so much for powerful speeches to decide political issues as for elegant poems to celebrate ancestral grandeur, military triumph, peaceful and benevolent sway. The poetry and criticism of Horace was part of an Augustan classical movement—back toward the high seriousness, if not the moral intensity, of Greek classical art. At the same time Horace had become a refined poet under the Epicurean influence of the school at Naples and along with the neoteric and Hellenizing coteries of the mid-century. He emerged from an Alexandrian atmosphere which may be symbolized equally by Catullus' lament of Lesbia for her sparrow and the sojourn of Cleopatra at Rome for the two years preceding the assassination of Caesar. Whatever earnest pleading Horace does is that of a poet for the poet's cause, as in the two long epistles of his Second Book, to Augustus and to Florus. His opponents are not politicians, sophists, or philosophers, but his fellow poets and various kinds of literary pretenders—the poetasters, criticasters, buffoons, libellers, aesthetes, and fops. "The Socratic dialogues (*Socraticae chartae*)," says Horace, "will provide you with ideas." His specialty is not the deep question or the tenacious train of reasoning, but the tacit assumption and upon this the neatly erected formula. Yet he is, in a way that is curiously his own, eminently worth while.

III

THE main thing assumed in the criticism of Horace is the normative value of the literary "species," [9] the genre, kind, or type, and of the companion principle designated by the term "propriety"—*to prepon* in Aristotelian criticism, *decorum* in Latin.[1] The ultimate reference for both genre and decorum was the Greek doctrine of ideas or forms, either in the Platonic or in the Aristotelian version. The Platonic, or supposedly Platonic, perfect idea of a thing had by the time of Horace developed a literary application which may be conveniently illustrated in these passages from Cicero's *Orator*.

> When that great artist [Phidias] was working on a statue of Jupiter or Minerva, he was not trying to copy an actually existing model but was intent on some vision of perfect beauty

[7] Seneca, *Epistles* XLIX, 5; Atkins, II, 44.
[8] Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* I, 10; Atkins, II, 53.
[9] As it was accurately called in English criticism of the 18th century.
[1] Cicero, *Orator* XXI.

(*species pulchritudinis eximia quaedam*). By that he directed his hand and chisel. And just as visible forms and figures each participate in a certain perfection or excellence, an intelligible ideal by reference to which the artist transcends mere ocular experience, so eloquence has its ideal, which we conceive in our minds and attempt to copy in audible words. These forms of things were called *ideas* by that eminent philosopher, that master of thought and speech, Plato. He said that they were an innate part of our minds and did not, like all other things, suffer beginning and end, flux and lapse, continual passage from one state to another. It follows that whatever topic a person undertakes to discuss rationally and methodically, he ought to reduce it to its ultimate and proper character and form.

I confess that I myself have learned whatever I may know about the art of oratory not from the workshops of the rhetoricians but from the spacious walks of the Academy.—*Orator* II–III, 9–10, 12

A fairly specific encouragement for such a literary doctrine had actually been given by Aristotle in those passages of his *Poetics* where he said that tragedy having passed through many stages of growth (*pollas metabolas metabalousa*) had reached its final and perfect stage, and where he said that characters should be true to life and internally consistent—or in those passages of the *Rhetoric* where he insisted that style should be appropriate to theme, or where he spoke of the differences between poetic and prose style and of the three main oratorical styles (matching the three main types of oratorical purpose), forensic, deliberative, epideictic. By the time of Horace, such notions had undergone a marked development in the subdivision and multiplication of fixed literary types and had acquired a nearly legislative prestige. Instead of the three literary genres, epic, tragedy and comedy, which are mainly treated by Aristotle, we have in the time of Horace a spectrum of genres including epic, tragedy, comedy, lyric, pastoral, satire, elegy, and epigram.[2] The aim of criticism was to expound for each of these types an *operis lex*[3] and its corollaries.

Horace begins his *Ars Poetica* with the negatively Aristotelian example of a mixed species, a beautiful woman sporting a fishtail, and after laughing at this, adds his sufficiently generalized but nonetheless

[2] Cf. Horace, *Satires* I, 10; *Epistles* II, 2; *Ars Poetica* 73; J. F. D'Alton, *Roman Literary Theory and Criticism* (London, 1931), Ch. VI.

[3] *Ars Poetica* 135. The edition of Horace mainly consulted here is that of the Loeb Classical Library: *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, ed. H. Rushton Fairclough, Cambridge, Mass., 1936; *The Odes and Epodes*, ed. C. E. Bennett, Cambridge, Mass., 1934. For a few longer passages, the "imitations" of Alexander Pope appear in lieu of translations. The prose paraphrases of shorter passages are the work of the present authors.

memorable advice about purple patches and unity. "Make it anything at all, so long as it hangs together" (*Sit quod vis, simplex dumtaxat et unum*). A long middle section of the poem, devoted in a rambling fashion to the history and rules of literary genres, manages to formulate a good many very explicit instructions:

> Five acts, no more, no less.
> *Neve minor neu sit quinto productior actu*
> *fabula.* 189
>
> Only three speakers at a time.
> *. . . nec quarta loqui persona laboret.* 192
>
> Scenes of butchery offstage.
> *ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet.* 185
>
> Plunge right in.
> *Semper ad eventum festinat et in medias res.* 148
>
> Hexameter verse for war poems.
> *Res gestae regumque ducumque et tristia bella*
> *quo scribi possent numero, monstrauit Homerus.* 73–4

Along with such rules come the more interesting gallery of capsule character types, from carefree boy to crotchety old man, " full of difficulties and complaints, the encomiast of days gone by" (*difficilis, querulus, laudator temporis acti,* 173)—and the formulas for historical figures, like the well-known thumbnail sketch of Achilles: "restless, wrathful, ruthless, fierce" (*impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,* 121). A very reasonable corollary of the doctrines of decorum and genre had been a shift from the Aristotelian *mimēsis* of nature to the fully classical and traditional kind of imitation,[4] that of models, a matter nicely epitomized by Horace:

> Be Homer's works your study and delight,
> Read them by day, and meditate by night.
> *vos exemplaria Graeca*
> *nocturna versate manu, versate diurna.*—268–9

IV

WE HAVE already suggested that it is one thing to make neatly turned pronouncements of this sort—perhaps even with semi-playful amusement

[4] George Converse Fiske, *Lucilius and Horace* (Madison, 1920), Chapter I; Richard McKeon, in *MP*, XXXIV (August 1936), 1–35. The imitation of models was consistent with the notion, occasionally expressed in classical antiquity and in the later age of neo-classicism, that primary topics of literary imitation had already all been imitated. Thus: *nullumst iam dictum quod non dictum sit prius* (Terence, *Eunuchus*, l. 41); *omnis ad accessus Heliconis semita trita est* (Manilius, *Astronomica* III, Prol.). Cf. *post* Ch. 10, pp. 178–81; Ch. 12, pp. 234–5; Ch. 15, pp. 326–7.

in the so tidy control of a situation—another to entertain a profound rationale in support of them or to be able to expound this. One question which modern scholars have asked about the critical assumptions of Horace is whether the notion of *decorum* entertained by him refers to something intrinsic to the nature of things or to something established by human convention.[5] This question can hardly be answered without one's taking some notice of a more general and more important question—that of how conventions in general are related to nature. Does the convention of a man's opening a door for a lady, or the salutation *dear* at the beginning of a letter, have any rightness in nature? Are these any better than others that might be imagined? There is little direct evidence of what Horace thought about this difficult question. His criticism does, however, offer a good example of the thorough interpenetration of nature and convention in the classical literary tradition. One recent way of stating the matter has been to say that the decorum of Horace is something affectively and socially oriented—toward the taste and standards of the aristocratic theater audience of his day rather than toward an Aristotelian or natural objectivity.[6] Does not the *Ars Poetica* allude to this audience repeatedly?

> Both highbrow and lowbrow will raise the loud guffaw.
> *Romani tollent equites peditesque cachinnum.* 113

> Take my advice—I know what your public wants.
> *Tu quid ego et populus mecum desideret audi.* 153

> The orchestra will be harder to please than the peanut gallery.
> *offenduntur enim, quibus est equus et pater et res,*
> *nec, si quid fricti ciceris probat et nucis emptor,*
> *aequis accipiunt animis donantve corona.* 248–50

But such an argument, we venture to suggest, lays too much theoretical stress on what can more plausibly be taken as only the most convenient and dramatic way of impressing young literary aspirants with the ideas of success and failure. The peanut gallery may cheer. The literati will laugh. Such are always among the possible rewards of trying to write poetry. But rewards do not constitute definitions. Horace himself has implied as much, in his *Epistle to Augustus,* where he despises the playwright's dependence on a public, and in his tenth *Satire,* where he asserts the sophistication of his satirical standard.

> Never mind what the mob thinks—"fit audience find, though few."

[5] Craig LaDrière, review of Wolf Steidle, *Studien zur Ars Poetica des Horaz,* 1939, in *American Journal of Philology,* LXIII (April, 1942), 241–3.

[6] R. S. Crane, review of Paul F. Saintonge *et al., Horace: Three Phases of His Influence,* Chicago, 1936, in *Philological Quarterly* XVI (April, 1937), 162–3.

> . . . *neque te ut miretur turba labores,*
> *contentus paucis lectoribus.* 73–4

"Let but Plotius and Varius approve of these verses. . . ." Horace appeals to an audience selected not by social or political standards but just by literary standards—to his fellow poets and his literary friends, to Maecenas and the other patrons and arbiters of the day. This procedure may be close to the fallacy which in our day C. S. Lewis has amusingly imputed to T. S. Eliot,[7] of crowning and mitring himself king and pope of pointland. (On Eliot's view that only a poet can judge of poetry, it must be only as a poet that he knows that his judges are poets and hence competent judges of his own poetry.) But it is a procedure which is the opposite of sociological. It is the opposite of an appeal to any decorum, or convention, established merely by the taste of the Roman gentlemen.

V

ANOTHER difficulty in interpreting Horace (rather a biographical than a strictly critical difficulty) may arise if we observe that some of his neatly turned dicta are not very readily squared with his own practice as a poet. His *Odes* and *Epodes*, for instance, are far too varied and original in their union of meter and matter to be accountable to such rules of the *Ars Poetica* as those which say that anger should be expressed in iambs, that only gods, sporting events, young love and the banquet should be treated in lyric meters. There is no place in the *Ars Poetica* for a facetious lyric like the Horatian *Integer vitae*, beginning with its over-confident claims for the man of sterling character ("he needs no barbaric armory"—*non eget Mauris jaculis*) and ending with the poet's lighthearted determination to keep thinking fondly of his Dulcinea no matter what happens (*dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo, dulce loquentem*). A scholar writing early in this century, and perhaps in a mood of over-responsiveness to the triumphant aesthetic of Benedetto Croce, has defended the practice of Horace against the theory of Horace in the following manner:

> It was the settled practice of the Renaissance that classical poetry should be regarded as the achievement of objective perfection; a practice which has had the most disastrous consequences. The very name of the "humanities" forbids that they be tried by the criterion of impeccability. . . . a genuine poem is not a machine, and is always subjective.
>
> . . .

[7] *A Preface to "Paradise Lost"* (Oxford, 1942), pp. 9–11.

> *Integer vitae* has long been felt to present difficulties. It begins like a hymn with the more or less solemn proclamation of the poet's inviolability, and ends with . . . gaiety.[8]

The alignment of ideas implicit, or even largely explicit, in this passage makes a curious antithesis. *Objectivity*, *perfection* or *impeccability*, and the machine go together as unpoetic and apparently almost equivalent, and in the opposite or poetic scale, *subjectivity* (and implicitly *imperfection*) and *spontaneity*. By such a division the only term which gains anything is *imperfection*, and this is a gain which poetry may not be grateful to find transferred to itself. The charm of the lyric *Integer vitae* for this critic lies in the supposed fact that its ending is an afterthought, "purely decorative," connected to the beginning by very slight ties (though he says that this ending is "appropriate to the theme"). The difficulty might not have occurred had the critic noticed that *Integer vitae* does not in fact begin with the solemnity of a hymn (though it has been mistakenly set to hymn music) but with a playful exaggeration which is perfectly in keeping with its conclusion—and with its even more preposterous middle stanza, about a wolf that fled from the poet in the Apulian woods. It is perhaps stretching the evidence to say with another modern interpreter that the theory of decorum expounded by Horace is flexible enough to account entirely for his own practice.

> An organic, a vital, coherency, a beauty neither less nor more dependent on the adaptation (not ruthless subjugation) of means to ends than is the beauty of the creations of Nature herself, is the ideal pointed to by the school of criticism properly called Classic.[9]

Such a view does, however, have the advantage that it avoids the critical nonsense of applauding Horace for imperfections.

> I am annoyed when I come across mistakes in a classic like Homer. *indignor quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus.—Ars Poetica* 359

And such a view finds added support when we survey not only certain passages in the *Ars Poetica* which tell against taking the rules too seriously but other more casually critical passages in the *Satires* and *Epistles*.

VI

THERE are places, we might say, where the conservative critical theory of Horace frays out or blurs into his actual practice, places where he is

[8] Roy Kenneth Hack, "The Doctrine of Literary Forms," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, XXVII (1916), 35–6.

[9] A. Y. Campbell, *Horace, A New Interpretation* (London, 1924), p. 256.

less on guard as a theorist and mainly on the alert to catch every shade of advantage in writing the poet's apologia. Thus in the *Epistle to Augustus* he defends the innovating poets of his own circle against the archaizing snobbery and faddism of the patrician audience. And this involves him in the view that the classics were in their own day innovations.

> Had ancient times conspired to disallow
> What then was new, what had been ancient now?
> *Quod si tam Graecis novitas invisa fuisset*
> *quam nobis, quid nunc esset vetus?* 90–1

And we have the curious side look at Horace's theory of decorum which is provided through *Satires* I, 4 and 10, where he appears as if struggling, though scarcely in any theoretical anguish, with the opposed facts that satire had been a parvenu, a latter-day genre and a low one, but that to have invented it, as Lucilius did in the second century, was a great thing. Horace considers himself to be less than the inventor (*inventore minor*), though at the same time he can be scornful of Lucilius for his lack of polish and proud of himself for having added this quality. As Aristotle distinguished the abusive fun of Old Comedy from the witty innuendo of the New, Horace prefers the liberal polite jest and the shaded style, by turns grave and gay (*modo tristi, saepe jocoso*), to the harsher and coarser, the careless, satire of Lucilius written two hundred lines at a breath, "standing on one foot." (*In hora saepe ducentos, ut magnum, versus dictabat stans pede in uno.* I, 4, l.10.) A fairly strict theory of decorum begins to operate no doubt where Horace gives up the defence of both himself and Lucilius as poets, saying that satire is after all not poetry at all—not noble enough—just words put together in verse though they might as well be in prose (*sermoni propiora*, I, 4, l.42).[1] The name for his satires is in fact "Talks," "Causeries"—*Sermones.*[2] To support this humility, Horace is even willing to countenance the question, raised by some others, whether comedy is or is not poetry—for it lacks fire and force both in words and matter (*quod acer spiritus ac vis nec verbis nec rebus inest.* I, 4, ll. 45–6). There is evidence in the *Epistle to Augustus*, however, and in the *Ars Poetica*, that Horace actually considered comedy when it was polished, like that of Menander and Terence (scarcely that of Plautus), to be real poetry. Satire too, if we allow ourselves the indulgence of speculating about what Horace most sincerely thought, probably stood a little higher in his estimation than the tactical

[1] Cf. H. R. Fairclough, "Horace's View of the Relations between Satire and Comedy," *American Journal of Philology*, XXXIV (1913), 186, 190; G. L. Hendrickson, "Horace, Serm. I, 4: A Protest and a Programme," *American Journal of Philology*, XXI (1900), 121–42.

[2] Lucilius had used the term *sermones* of his own satires (Fairclough, *loc. cit.*, pp. 187, 191). In *Satire* II, 6, l. 17 Horace is content to be inspired by a *musa pedestris.*

modesty of his apologia would indicate. He concludes his confession with an evasion. "Some other time we'll see whether this kind of writing is true poetry or not" (*alias justum sit necne poema . . . genus hoc scribendi.* I, 4, ll. 63–5).

The least rigid of all Horatian doctrines is that concerning the low and the lofty in language. Here we see the idea of decorum placed in the most softening and concessive light. Horace pays his notable respects to dignity and splendor of diction in a passage of his *Epistle to Florus* often quoted in neo-classic times—for instance, as the motto of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary:*

> at qui legitimum cupiet fecisse poema,
> cum tabulis animum censoris sumet honesti;
> audebit, quaecunque parum splendoris habebunt
> et sine pondere erunt et honore indigna ferentur,
> verba movere loco, quamvis invita recedant
> et versentur adhuc intra penetralia Vestae;
> obscurata diu populo bonus eruet atque
> proferet in lucem speciosa vocabula rerum,
> quae priscis memorata Catonibus atque Cethegis
> nunc situs informis premit et deserta vetustas;
> adsciscet nova, quae genitor produxerit usus.
>
> —*Epistle* II, 2, ll. 109ff.

In the adaptation of Pope:

> But how severely with themselves proceed
> The men who write such Verse as we can read?
> Their own strict Judges, not a word they spare
> That wants or force, or light, or weight, or care,
> Howe'er unwillingly it quits its place,
> Nay tho' at Court (perhaps) it may find grace:
> Such they'll degrade; and sometimes, in its stead,
> In downright Charity revive the dead;
> Mark where a bold expressive phrase appears,
> Bright thro' the rubbish of some hundred years;
> Command old words that long have slept, to wake,
> Words, that wise Bacon, or brave Raleigh spake;
> Or bid the new be English, ages hence,
> (For Use will father what's begot by Sense).

It is a plea for coinages and revivals almost the opposite in emphasis from those cautious words of Pope in his own *Essay on Criticism* recommending the mean between the old-fashioned and the new-fangled.

> In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold;
> Alike fantastic, if too new, or old:

> Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
> Nor yet the last to lay the old aside. II, 333 ff.

In *Satire* I, 10 Horace has his fun at the expense of the affected neoterics who salted their Latin with Greek (*At magnum fecit, quod verbis Graeca Latinis miscuit,* 20), but in the *Ars Poetica* he recognizes the principle (later rampant in vernacular poetics of the Renaissance) that a language may be enriched by adaptations from one older and more impressive:

> Newly coined words will get by if they are taken from the Greek, a few at a time.
>
> *et nova fictaque nuper habebunt verba fidem, si*
> *Graeco fonte cadent parce detorta.* 52–3

Yet Alexander Pope probably considered the passage quoted above from his *Essay on Criticism* Horatian enough in spirit—and he was not far wrong. The double principle of decorum and fertility which appears in the last line of Johnson's *Dictionary* motto (*quae genitor produxerit usus*) may not express the emphatic idea of the whole passage, but it still expresses something central to Horace's view of language, an implicit key or point of control. Horace takes the middle way, that of living speech. Both with regard to obsolescence, the passing away of fine old words, and with regard to revivals, the norm is usage.[8] Usage is the final court of appeal.

> Many words that have perished will be reborn, and many will perish that now live respected—if Usage says so. Usage is judge and law and rule of speech.
>
> *multa renascentur quae jam cecidere, cadentque*
> *quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula* (the hexameter falls with a wistful cadence), *si volet usus,*
> *quem penes arbitrium est et jus et norma loquendi. Ars Poetica* 70–2

The Horatian doctrine of usage—steering between Attic purism on the one hand and on the other aristocratic archaizing and macaronic Hellenizing—defines the vital speech of a satirist, a social poet of everyday words (*sermoni propiora*). This is the more remarkable when we consider the degree of formal codification at which contemporary rhetoric had arrived. Such a view of the poetic idiom owes something, no doubt, to the kind of humility which is seen also in the Horatian apology, or

[8] In the third-century debate between Analogists and Anomalists to which we have referred above (Chapter 4), Horace would have been among the latter, the sceptics about any natural fitness of words for things.

mock apology, for the satiric genre. The view can scarcely be separated either from the realist theory of comedy coming down from Aristotle[4] and expressed for Augustan Rome in the Ciceronian phrases (preserved by Donatus) *comoedia . . . imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis.*[5] In his Epistle to Augustus (168–70) Horace advances in defence of comedy the argument that, although its everyday materials are easy enough to come by, yet the comic writer's task is an especially exacting one because his descriptions of life are so easily held to account (*habet Comoedia tanto plus oneris, quanto veniae minus*). Despite the fact that the *Ars Poetica* says so much about epic and drama, even noting satyr plays and stage music,[6] and despite the modest claim for satire which we have quoted, the satire and epistle and the conversational lyric are the Horatian genres. It is through these that the more general insights of Horace into poetry are focussed—as those of Aristotle were focussed through the theatrical genres of tragedy and comedy. For in a wider sense Horace does define the idiom of all poetry. As a modern poet has put it, in all solemnity:

> The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
> An easy commerce of the old and the new,
> The common word exact without vulgarity,
> The formal word precise but not pedantic.[7]

Add to this conception of idiom another conception, casually asserted by Horace, that of "order and juncture"—the "cunning juncture" of words (*series juncturaque, callida junctura—Ars Poetica*, 242, 47), and we recognize the precept of the cliché-breaker, the mind persistently on the verge of metaphor.

> I'll give a twist to the familiar that will make anybody think he could do the same—but he will waste his perspiration if he tries.
>
> *ex noto fictum carmen sequar, ut sibi quivis*
> *speret idem, sudet multum frustraque laboret ausus idem.* 240–2

VII

One of the most widely read amateurs of criticism in recent times, G. E. B. Saintsbury, called Horace's *Ars Poetica* a treatise *De Medio-*

[4] Cf. *ante* Chapter 3.

[5] Atkins, II, 38; H. R. Fairclough, *American Journal of Philology*, XXXIV, 183. Cf. *ante* Chapter 3, p. 50.

[6] A fact which has been taken to argue the construction of the *Ars Poetica* upon a Hellenistic model (Atkins, II, 71–2).

[7] T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, V.

critate. To inquire into the justice of this disparagement would be to raise again, as with Hack, the question whether perfection (of precisely turned idiomatic speech) is the contrary of poetic force and a check upon it or is not rather its appropriate channel and its only realization. But Saintsbury's *mot,* set against certain conspicuous features of Horace's poem, may remind us of another perennial question for criticism. An academic wit of our own day has observed that pretty good poetry is like pretty good eggs. In the 18th century, when James Boswell once argued, for the sake of argument, that "poetry of a middle sort was entitled to some esteem," Samuel Johnson retorted that since poetry is a luxury and there is no necessity for our having it at all, it can have no value unless exquisite.[8] The perennial inclination of both critic and poet toward a kind of perfectionism, perhaps snobbishness, which sets them apart from producers and critics in other fields, even in some of the other arts, poses, besides social and editorial problems, a difficult critical problem. If there is some sort of absolute difference between the poem which is really a poem and that which is not—if there are no middle grounds, as there are with most human values, no shades of goodness, grace, and nourishment—why is this so? Is it so? We shall see the opposite implication in some of the most metaphysical defences of aesthetic value. The point here is that the tradition of perfectionism has one of its most insistent formulas in the *Ars Poetica* of Horace—not only in the whole drift of the treatise, its plenary range of decorums, but in the celebrated dictum: "Neither gods nor mortals—nor booksellers—have any use for the middling poet."

mediocribus esse poetis
non homines, non di, non concessere columnae. 372–3

If Horace's treatise was *De Mediocritate,* this was surely not according to his own conception. And it is in fact only by the odd equation "Perfection=Mediocrity" that one can make it so. Nevertheless, it is one of the curiosities of critical history, perhaps symptomatic of a deeply founded and irreconcilable paradox, that this equation has often been assumed—and not necessarily in opposition to high ideals but apparently in support of them. We shall see a classical source of the equation in our next chapter.

VIII

If one were looking for an ironic illustration of the doctrine of genres, it could most readily be found in the fact that classical scholars have seriously debated the question whether the *Ars Poetica* is to be taken as

[8] Boswell's *Life,* April 10, 1775.

a theoretical treatise (a formal *poetics*), or as an introductory and practical guide (an *isagoge*), or, its haphazard sequence of topics considered, as merely an *epistle* to a friend.[9] As a critical question this may be readily dismissed for its utter vacuity. It may have some historical or genetic sense—what genre would Horace, if asked, have said that he was writing? The fact is that the poem presents a rather random structure—it tends itself to be an instance of beautiful woman shading into fish (. . . *in piscem mulier formosa superne*). It can scarcely be invoked to illustrate its own dictum:

> a place for everything and everything in its place.
> *ut iam nunc dicat iam nunc debentia dici.* 43

"Horace still charms with graceful negligence and without method talks us into sense." [1] So far as one can discern an overall order, it is roughly this: Lines 1–72 present a miscellaneous bundle of topics: *purple patches, unity, brevity, writing within one's own powers, order of ideas, verbal usage,*—all of which might be conceived under some such head as *poesis*, the qualities that go into poems, the common sinews. Lines 73–294 speak of various genres, their history, decorum, and rules—the form of the whole poem itself—*poema.* Lines 295–476 tell some jokes about poets and give some partly jocular good advice about what to do and what not to do in being a poet; they present a miscellaneous bundle of ideas about *poeta.* This threefold division is one of the main resemblances which Horace is thought to show to the Peripateticism of Neoptolemus rather than to the more simplified Epicureanism of Philodemus. It is a division deriving from two distinctions which had been made by theoretical critics with increasing explicitness from early times: that between the matter (or statement) of poetry and its poetic "form," and that between the poem and the poet. The first of these distinctions we have seen entertained by Aristotle, but with a restraint dictated by his basic view that the residence of forms is only in concrete things. The threefold arrangement of Neoptolemus, his *poiēsis* (matter), *poiēma* (form), *poiētēs* (poet) —was more clearly divisive—though of course Neoptolemus, like most Hellenists, asserted that "matter" and "form" were alike important.[2] As the emphasis fell on "form" or on "matter", one other thing had usually been decided in Hellenistic criticism—the question whether the function of poetry is hedonistic or didactic—whether the correct view is the Ionian and Homeric, that the aim of poetry is pleasure through enchantment, or the Boeotian and Hesiodic, that it is teaching. Stoic philosophers held more or less consistently to the contentual or didactic view. Profes-

[9] R. K. Hack, *loc. cit.*, pp. 9–10.

[1] Scaliger was to call the poem "an art written without art." Heinsius transposed passages to improve it. *Atkins*, II, 69.

[2] Atkins, I, 170–3.

sional scholars and critics, like Heracliodorus and Eratosthenes, dwelt on diversion and the enchantment of beautiful words. But Horace's model Neoptolemus adopted what we may call a Peripatetic compromise, Aristotelian in spirit but more specific than Aristotle,[3] the doctrine that the aim of poetry is twofold, to charm and at the same time to be a useful teacher.[4] It is this adjustment of the issue, the hedonistic-pedagogic compromise, which we find in one of the passages of the *Ars Poetica* most often quoted by posterity. "Either a poet tries to give good advice, or he tries to be amusing—or he tries to do both. . . . A mixture of pleasure and profit appeals to every reader—an equal administration of sermon and tickle."

> *Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae*
> *aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae.* 333–4
>
> *omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci,*
> *lectorem delectando pariterque monendo.* 343–4

The second main distinction which enters into the threefold division of the *Ars Poetica*, that between poem and poet, is one with which we have already been concerned in several earlier places—in alluding to the personal invocations of the muse by Homer and Hesiod, in discussing the semi-ironic retreat by Socrates from the analysis of poetry to the *theia moira* (divine dispensation) or magnetic irradiation of the poet himself. The *Odes* of Horace offer enough evidence that the poet's divine inspiration was still a current concept—if perhaps largely a tacit myth or poetical figure. But divine inspiration bears a close resemblance to another mysterious thing, that which is often called "genius" or a natural gift. A different version of the antithesis poet-poem occurs in Pindar's contention that poetry is nature (*phua*, not *techmē*), in Aristotle's passing word about the poet's special sensibility (*Poetics* XVII), in the remarks dropped in his *Rhetoric* to the effect that certain things are to be learned either by native insight or by technical training (I, i; III, i), and in the four requirements for good rhetoric named by Isocrates: native ability (*phusis*), practice (*epimeleia*), technical knowledge (*epistēmē*), and imitation of models.[5] An intimate correspondence between the character of the verbal artist and the worth of his utterance was a reiterated doctrine of antiquity which received such neat epitomes as the Stoic definition of an orator, "a morally good verbal technician"

[3] Aristotle, despite the cathartic clause in his theory, had indicated that the aim of each kind of fine art is to give the pleasure proper to it (*Poetics* XIV).

[4] Atkins, I, 175–7. Cf. the Lucretian figure of bitter medicine in the honeyed cup (*De Rerum Natura* I, 936–50) and the ancient definition quoted in Strabo's *Geography* I, 2: poetry is "a primitive philosophy guiding our morals, our tastes, and our actions."

[5] Atkins, I, 127–8.

(*vir bonus dicendi peritus*),[6] or the statement of the younger Seneca that a man's oratory could be no better than his life (*talis hominum oratio qualis vita*).[7] It is this branch of the doctrine, rather than that referring to divine inspiration, which appears in the Peripatetic arrangement: *poiēsis, poiēma, poiētēs*. But apparently *poiētēs*, on any terms, lent himself much less readily to formal analysis than did his product. Neoptolemus is able to observe that native gifts (*dunamis hē poiētikē*) as well as technical skill (*technē*) are requisite. He can distinguish between the technically skilful writer and the born poet.[8] And this was about all anybody had been able to say about the poet himself as distinct from his poems. Perhaps even this distinction between genius and technique was no more than a translation of the initial distinction, from which it stemmed, that between poet and poem. A fragment ascribed to Simylus,[9] a didactic poet, probably of the Hellenistic period, reduces the issue to absurdity by asserting that neither genius (*phusis*) nor art (*technē*) is any good alone, nor both together without practice (*meletē*), good luck (*kairos euphuēs*) and a well-disposed critic (*kritēs*).

IX

The *Ars Poetica* of Horace is a climax to all this history in the neat compression of his statement about a choice that was no choice at all. "People like to ask whether a good poem comes natural or is produced by craft. So far as I can see, neither book-learning without a lot of inspiration nor unimproved genius can get very far. The two things work together and need each other."

> *Natura fieret laudabile carmen an arte,*
> *quaesitum est: ego nec studium sine divite vena*
> *nec rude quid prosit video ingenium; alterius sic*
> *altera poscit opem res et coniurat amice.* 408–11

For Horace neither the distinction between poem and poet nor that between *ars* and *ingenium* was very rigorous, as may be seen indeed in the number of rather mixed statements which he contrived to make about the poet, a few of them even in the first two sections of the *Ars*, sections which are ostensibly concerned with poetry and poems. Shortly after the advice about brevity running the danger of obscurity (*brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio*), comes that about knowing our own limitations

[6] Preserved from a lost treatise on rhetoric by the elder Cato (Atkins, II, 16). The same source gives us the memorable advice about content and form: *rem tene, verba sequentur.*

[7] *Letters to Lucilius*, CXIV, 16; Atkins, II, 168, 325. Such ideas were given a reverse twist by Epicurus: the wise man would "live poems" rather than write them.

[8] Atkins, I, 173.

[9] Preserved by Stobaeus (A.D. c. 500) in his *Florilegium;* Atkins, I, 180. The fragment is quoted by Ben Jonson in his *Discoveries.*

(*Sumite materiam vestris, qui scribitis, aequam viribus*, 38–9). After the history of the tragic and comic genres, comes "patience and revision" (*limae labor et mora*, 291).[1] Almost the whole third section of the poem is of course not theory of poetry at all but theory of being a poet (if we may take the liberty of turning some of Horace's satirical descriptions into terms of advice): Don't be a Bohemian; a bath won't wash off your inspiration. Read Socrates and get wisdom. Too bad for your poetic chances if you have been exposed to the standard Roman commercial education. Be careful, but not paralysed with scruples (*non ego paucis offendar maculis*). Aim at the top (*mediocribus esse poetis . . .*) Don't force your inspiration (*Tu nihil invita dices faciesve Minerva*). Don't rush into print (*nonumque prematur in annum*). Remember the glorious history of poetry, its sacred function. Don't take the praise of your friends and retainers too seriously. Get the advice of an honest critic—and follow it. Be steady, the best poet is not the mad one. The concluding paragraph of Horace's eipstle, an almost Rabelaisian portrait of the crazy poet—victim of the itch (*scabies*), of the king's disease (*morbus regius*), of some frantic hallucination (*fanaticus error*), or of lunacy (*iracunda Diana*), or perhaps a man who has defiled ancestral ashes or disturbed a consecrated spot—shows how far the sophisticated Augustan age had moved away from the ancient theory of the poet as a vessel of Dionysiac enthusiasm.[2] The Horatian view of poetic inspiration lies in the field of author-psychology and professional strategy.

The *Ars Poetica* of Horace is a nice mélange of objective and critical rules with snatches of studio wisdom. Keep your pencils sharpened, carry a pocket notebook, drink a pint of beer with lunch, go walking in the country, listen to the muse when she speaks, recollect your emotions in tranquillity, revise carefully, take your time in publishing. It is no derogation from such statements to say that they are not strictly parts of criticism. In the *Ars Poetica* of Horace they are, despite the random structure of the poem, not actually in great danger of being confused with criticism. One of the advantages of the aphoristic style is that its ideas tend to stay detached and clean. The implications of a given *dictum* do not operate very far in any direction.

[1] The oft-quoted "*si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi*," 102–3, is not in its context a genetic rule. It refers to the roles of tragic characters, Telephus or Peleus.

[2] Cf. Persius, Prologue to *Satires;* Lucian, *Discussion with Hesiod.*

SUPPLEMENT

THE SONNET

Sir,— The sonnet has a universally accepted rhythm, beat, rhyme and number of lines. The rules apply not only to English sonnets but to those of all cultivated lands. You do our nation and yourselves, as a critical literary journal, a real disservice when (October 13) you accept the line "My moon is brought down from the sky in kindness" as a sonnet line, without any comment or reproof to the author who perpetrates it. However charming Mr. Warner's poems from which you quote may be as lyrics, the one you quote without comment as a sonnet is simply not a sonnet. In these days of weak and gagged critics, we look to your paper for a cultivated criticism to arrest the decay of English letters by ardent but lazy and conceited young writers who do not take the trouble to learn the elements of their craft.

Marie Carmichael Stopes

—*The Times Literary Supplement*, London, November 3, 1945, p. 523, quoted by permission of *The Times*

Analysis

Last Tuesday morning a young lady employed as a reader by one of the local book publishers turned in a report on the manuscript of a novel she had been reading. She had this to say about one of the leading characters: "I do not think this man should be identified as a bookmaker. He seems too uncouth, even sporty, a character to be wholly convincing as a craftsman."

—*The New Yorker*, December 2, 1944, by permission; © 1944 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

The unskilful poet will portray a dolphin living in the woods and a wild boar on the ocean. (*Delphinum silvis adpingit, fluctibus aprum.*)

—Horace, *Ars Poetica*, l. 29

The fishes got stuck in the tops of the elms, where the doves usually sat. and frightened deer were swimming on the flood.

(*Piscium et summa genus haesit ulmo*
Nota quae sedes fuerat columbis
Et superjecto pavidae natarunt
Aequore dammae.)

—Horace, *Odes*, I, 2, 9–12

He is to consider himself as a Grotesque painter, whose works would be spoiled by an imitation of nature, or uniformity of design. He is to mingle bits of the most various, or discordant kinds, landscape, history, portraits, animals, and connect them with a great deal of flourishing, by heads or tails, as it shall please his imagination, and contribute to his principal end, which is to glare by strong oppositions of colours, and surprise by contrariety of images.

Serpentes avibus geminentur, tigribus agni. Horace.

His design ought to be like a labyrinth, out of which nobody can get clear but himself. And since the great Art of all Poetry is to mix Truth with Fiction, in order to join the *Credible* with the *Suprising;* our author shall produce the Credible, by painting nature in her lowest simplicity; and the Surprising, by contradicting common opinion. In the very Manners he will affect the *Marvellous;* he will draw Achilles with the patience of Job; a Prince talking like a Jack-Pudding; a Maid of honour selling bargains; a footman speaking like a philosopher; and a fine gentleman like a scholar. Whoever is conversant in modern Plays, may make a most noble collection of this kind, and, at the same time, form a complete body of modern *Ethics and Morality.*

—Alexander Pope and friends, *Peri Bathous: or of the Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1728), Chapter V, "Of the true Genius for the Profund, and by what it is constituted"

CHAPTER 6

ROMAN CLASSICISM: LONGINUS

§ *date and context of* Peri Hupsous—*II. elevation* (*the sublime*), ekstasis, *the five "sources": great ideas, passion, figures, diction, synthesis, little actually said about the first two—III. political and ethical differences between the Augustan and Imperial eras, interest in the poet's soul, imitation as inspiration, the five sources not co-ordinate, the "diagonal distinction"—IV. development of verbal rhetoric in the Hellenistic and Roman eras—V. Longinian rhetorical technicalities, devices for reconciling them with elevation and passion, correctness vs. grandeur—VI. variety of criteria considered in* Peri Hupsous, *universality, physical grandeur, Petronius, anticipations of heroic drama and Kant—VII. occasional subtleties, synthesis as rhythm or as verbal ordonnance, Sappho's Ode, "synaesthesis," Longinian decorum of transport* §

THE HORATIAN INTEREST IN THE AUTHOR NO DOUBT OWED SOMETHING to the Epicurean and anti-rhetorical teaching of Philodemus of Gadara, the professor to whom Horace may have been exposed in his youth. Viewed in that way the ideas of Horace become part of a critical trend, a "romantic" concern for the poet's inspiration which, if we may generalize somewhat broadly, came to its climax only in the second half of the next century. This climax is recorded for us not in the writing of a school but in the single extraordinary essay entitled *Peri Hupsous*, to which (or to the major part of the essay which survives) the name of an otherwise unknown "Longinus" has become attached. An alignment with the age of Horace is specially suggested by the fact that Longinus refers (Chapter III) with the deference of an old pupil or epigonist to another Gadarine or Epicurean philosopher, Theodorus, and

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even more by the fact that the main argument of the essay is directed against a certain Caecilius of Calacte, a rhetorician and a friend of the famous rhetorical critic Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who flourished at Rome during the Augustan period.[1] A certain slant of the essay toward the *somnia Pythagorea* of neo-Platonism has led one recent commentator[2] to return to the accepted Renaissance view that Longinus was Cassius Longinus, philosopher-rhetorician of the third century, friend of Plotinus, teacher of Porphyry at Athens, and unfortunate counsellor of the rebellious Palmyran Queen Zenobia. But the internal evidence, especially the range of quotations and allusions, from Homer to Caecilius and other Augustan rhetoricians, sufficiently argues for a Greek rhetorician at Rome in the first century.[3] The text of the *Peri Hupsous* is a discovery of the 16th century—in the first edition by Robortello at Basel in 1554. No reference to the essay from either classical or medieval times survives.

II

UNDERTAKING to improve on the work of the Augustan Caecilius, Longinus insists that Caecilius has said little about the sources, or components, of what both authors call *hupsos*,[4] a quality of "elevation" in writing, of intensity or eloquence, the "sublime," as it was much later to be called. It could appear in prose or in poetry, in the oratory of Demosthenes, the dialogues of Plato, the epic narrative of Homer, the Greek drama, the lyric poetry of Sappho, the opening of the Hebrew Lawgiver's *Genesis:* " 'God said'—what? 'Let there be light, and there was light; let there be land, and there was land' " (IX). The range of the author's reading and his capacity for enthusiasm are among the most striking characters of the essay. A strong interest in the emotional response of the poetic audience is indicated by a distinction between rhetoric and poetry made in the first chapter: "The effect of elevated language upon

[1] Caecilius was a member of the reigning school of Apollodorus, the more doctrinaire champions of rhetorical rule. See Atkins, II, 214.

[2] R. A. Scott-James, *The Making of Literature* (London, 1936), ch. VIII, "The First Romantic Critic," pp. 81–3.

[3] W. Rhys Roberts, *Longinus on the Sublime* (Cambridge, 1935), Introduction. We quote the translation of Roberts throughout this chapter, by permission of the Cambridge University Press.

[4] Other similar expressions used by the author are *ta huperphua, ta megala, ta megathē, to megalophuēs, hē hupsēgoria, to thaumasion, to hupertetamenon.* The term *bathos,* used in Chapter II, is apparently a synonym (though taken waggishly by Alexander Pope as an antonym and hence given its modern English meaning). Cf. Atkins, II, 253; Roberts, Appendix B; St. Paul, *Romans* XI, 33–6; *Ephesians* III, 13–21. The earliest English translations were *Of the Height of Eloquence,* by John Hall, 1662, and *Of the Loftiness or Elegancy of Speech,* by John Pulteney, 1680. After the translation by Boileau in 1674 the term "sublime" prevailed. Cf. A. F. B. Clark, *Boileau and the French Classical Critics* (Paris, 1925), pp. 371–5.

an audience is not persuasion but transport." And transport (*ekstasis*) [5] has been one of the ideas principally associated with Longinus by posterity. The chief theoretical challenge of the essay, however, lies in a certain peculiarity to be observed in the basic layout of the whole upon a five-fold division of the "sources" of "elevation." These five, announced and briefly defined in chapter VIII, are: (1) the power of forming great conceptions (*noēseis*), (2) inspired and vehement passion (*sphodron kai enthousiastikon pathos*), (3) formation of figures (*schēmata*), (4) noble diction (*phrasis*), (5) dignified and elevated "composition" (*sunthesis*). It is a regrettable matter that we do not actually hear as much about the first two of these sources, great conceptions and vehement passions, as we should like and as we may be led to expect from the plan announced in chapter VIII. The emotions, we learn in a later chapter (XLIV), were to be treated in another, now unknown, essay. And one of the most distressing lacunae in the Paris manuscript, that of six leaves from the second quaternion (KE), occurs in the very midst of the discussion about great conceptions.[6] "Sublimity is the echo of a great soul" (*hupsos megalophrosunēs apēchēma*). And after a few more lines, *Desunt sex folia.* Nevertheless it is clear enough that "sources" (1) and (2), conceptions and passions, refer to the state of the poet's soul more emphatically than to anything in poems themselves. They are both parts of greatness of soul, both, as Longinus puts it, on the side of nature, whereas "sources" (3), (4), and (5), figures, diction, and composition, are on the side of art.

III

One of the differences between Horace and Longinus is the difference between the ethical and patriotic Augustan era (conducive, it seemed, to great poetry) in which Horace wrote and the later corrupt and discouraging times to which Longinus in the closing chapter of his essay attributes a decline in poetic power and eloquence. It was common for philosophers during the reign of Vespasian to look back wistfully (*laudatores temporis acti*) to Republican institutions, to argue that democratic freedom had nurtured genius, and to impute a contemporary decline in oratory to political servitude. Longinus, like other literary men,[7]

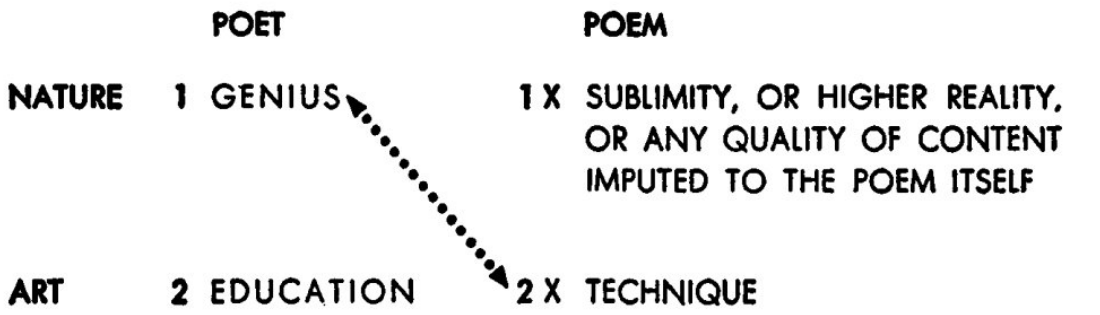
[5] In Chapter XV vivid poetical images (*phantasiai*) aim at enthrallment (*ekplēksis*).

[6] A fact which might seem remarkable, that in a manuscript of which more than a third is missing, the forty-four chapter numbers remain, is explained by the further fact that the chapter headings are in a later hand than that of the scribe who wrote *Parisinus 2036,* the primary surviving manuscript, of the tenth century. This manuscript lacks actually eight leaves at the place mentioned, but the first and last are supplied from another manuscript. See Roberts, pp. 166, 169.

[7] "Similar speculations" may be "traced in the writings of the two Senecas, Petronius, Tacitus, and Velleius Paterculus; and to these discussions later contributions were to be made by Quintilian and the younger Pliny" (Atkins, II, 215).

though agreeing with the philosophers about the literary decline, professed to have more confidence in the restorative power of enlightened autocracy. He puts the argument against autocracy in the mouths of the philosophers and for his own part lays the blame for decline on ethical rather than political causes, on the prevailing vices of the day, love of money and pleasure, insolence, and lawlessness—the general atrophy of man's immortal part, the soul. "It is not possible that men with mean and servile ideas . . . should produce anything that is admirable and worthy of immortality." Such an interest in the causes of poetic decline was the legitimate complement of his profound interest in the cultivation of the poet's soul as the way to sublimity. "Homer enters into the sublime action of his heroes." He "shares the full inspiration of the combat" (IX). In the first chapter of the essay a point of complaint against the Augustan critic Caecilius is that he has, "strangely enough," failed to tell how "we may succeed in raising our own capacities to a certain pitch of elevation." And one of the most distinctive features of the Longinian system is a special version of the Roman doctrine of imitation. What Horace was content to understand as a technical imitation of classic models becomes for Longinus something far more exciting, a powerful illumination and inspiration enjoyed through submission to the ancient masters. As the Pythian priestess is impregnated with prophetic knowledge by a divine afflatus which rises through the floor of the Delphic chamber, so modern devotees of the ancient poets experience a kind of inspirational effluence from those mighty souls (XIII).

To turn our attention once again to all *five* sources of the sublime and try to see these in a single perspective: the basis of division, a logician might say, is not single. (1) and (2), thoughts and emotions, are coextensive, not co-ordinate, with (3), (4), and (5), the rhetorical features. The quintuple division does not in reality constitute a single logical classification coextensive with the sources of the sublime. The Longinian preoccupation with the genius of the poet (as it is managed in the essay alongside of the rhetorical themes) suggests a question whether the two ancient distinctions which we have considered in our last chapter, that between *poiēsis* (content) and *poiēma* (form) and that between either *poiēsis* or *poiēma* on the one hand and on the other *poiētēs* (the author), may not sometimes become confused. The more compact choice *natura . . . an arte* (*ingenium* or *studium?* natural gifts or studied art?) seems to be equally capable of referring either to two things in the poet, his native genius and his acquired art, or to two other things, no doubt reflections of the first, but properly enough attributed to the poem itself, its fidelity to some kind of nature and its artfulness or technique. The problem may be sketched by a table having four compartments, as follows:



A literary psychologist or a teacher of composition might well wish to inquire whether 1 or 2 in this table is the more important for the making of a poet, and whether they produce respectively and separately 1x and 2x or (what is more plausible) combine—both causes producing each effect. But a theorist looking at literature itself may be more concerned with inquiring whether 1x and 2x can actually be distinguished within a poem, and if they can, which is the more important, and what the relation is between the two. The last question may be par excellence the question confronting the literary theorist. What it is more relevant to stress at the present moment, however, is the possibility that a theorist might slide into yet another distinction, one which seems to harbor a certain duplicity and invalidity. This might conveniently be called the "Diagonal Distinction." It is indicated by the dotted line in the table. Two distinctions in one, we may say, by which the agile theorist is able to move out of an area of difficulty and reappear in another area with a solution which does not legitimately avail for the first. As if a theoretical rhetorician on being pushed to the wall about extravagance of conceits or figures in his favorite author were to answer: "Well, I excuse them on the grounds of the author's genius, the high seriousness of his message, and his intense emotion. Lesser persons, you and I, couldn't get away with them. But he obviously can. It is because he has the ideas and passions of a great soul. He uses his figures sincerely."

IV

But it may be well at this point to back away and return to the *Peri Hupsous* from another angle, observing that this essay is after all a rhetorician's essay, the third and fourth sources of elevation—that is, diction and figures—filling a very large part of what survives (Chapters XVI–XL). The chapters on these two sources, much more than the casual and graceful dicta of Horace on words, require for their understanding that one remember the degree of formal codification at which Graeco-Roman rhetoric had arrived. The history of that rhetoric was

one which closely paralleled the history of the Horatian genre concepts.

The victory of verbal rhetoric which we have described in an earlier chapter had not occurred without serious cost through the encouragement which it gave to a hyper-development of rhetorical machinery. Where Isocrates had named[8] and Aristotle (*Rhetoric* III, 13) had grudgingly accepted four main parts of a speech: *proem, narrative, proof,* and *epilogue,* Cicero in his youthful summation of Hellenistic doctrine, the *De Inventione,* prescribes for the custom-built speech the following five: *exordium, narratio, argumentum, refutatio, peroratio.* The loose divisions of the art itself rather casually implied by Aristotle—*heurēsis* or finding of arguments (Books I and II of the *Rhetoric*), *taxis* or structure (Book III, Chapters 13–19), *lexis* or verbal style (Book III, Chapters 1–12), *hupocrisis,* acting or delivery (mentioned disrespectfully in Book III, Chapter 1)—have become in Cicero's *De Inventione* (I, 9) the clearly definable and formally distinct four heads: *inventio* (*heurēsis*), *dispositio* (*taxis*), *elocutio* (*lexis*), and *pronuntiatio* (*hupocrisis*), and at the same time a fifth and purely subjective head, *memoria,* has been added between *elocutio* and *pronuntiatio.* The kind of analytic interest shown by Aristotle in such technically namable figures as *parisōsis, paromoiōsis, antithesis, homōnumia,* and *metaphora*[9] had blossomed by the time of Horace into the manifold repertoire of the figures of speech and figures of thought (*figurae verbi, figurae sententiae; schēmata lexeōs, schēmata dianoiēs*). These were managed with diverse efforts at precision by numerous rhetoricians, by Cicero in his *De Oratore,*[1] by his contemporaries, the anonymous author of the Hellenistic *Ad Herennium* and the Greek litterateur Dionysius of Halicarnassus in his *Peri Suntheseōs Onomatōn* (*On Verbal Composition*), and during the next century by Demetrius in his *Peri Hermēneias* (*On Style*) and by Quintilian in Books VIII and IX of his *Institutio Oratoria.* Finally, the time of Horace and Cicero saw the firm establishment of three (or four) *kinds* of verbal style. Aristotle had said cautiously that it might be useful to think about three areas of prose style, appropriate more or less to the three recognized branches of oratory—forensic, deliberative, and epideictic.[2] With far greater confidence Cicero named the three now celebrated kinds of oratorical style: *genus vehemens, genus modicum, genus subtile* (*Orator* XXI). The author of the *Ad Herrenium* used the approximately synonymous terms: *grævis, mediocris, extenuata.*[3] The treatise *On Verbal Com-*

[8] Atkins, I, 132, says that Lysias first named these parts. Cf. R. C. Jebb, *Attic Orators from Antiphon to Isaeus* (London, 1893), II, 68.

[9] Balance of clauses, like sounds at beginning or end of clauses, antithesis, equivocation, metaphor.

[1] See *De Oratore* III, 36–54.

[2] Dionysius of Halicarnassus reports that the lost *Peri Lexeōs* of Theophrastus alludes to a mixed or middle style (Atkins, I, 156).

[3] *Ad Herennium* IV, viii.

position of Dionysius used a slightly different three: the elegant (*sunthesis glaphura*), the middle or common (*koinē*), and the severely plain (*austēra*); and the same author's *Essay on Demosthenes*, again a different three: the lofty or "sublime" (*charaktēr hupsēlos*), the middle (*mesos*), and the plain (*ischnos*). Demetrius is the only author who distinguishes not three styles, but four: the magnificent (*charaktēr megaloprepēs*), the elegant (*glaphuros*), the plain (*ischnos*), and the forceful (*deinos*).[4]

The three styles had been linked by Cicero with three great purposes of oratory: to prove (low style), to please (middle style), and to move or persuade (vigorous or lofty style).[5] Cicero distinguished the style of oratory in general from the styles of philosophy, sophistry, history, and poetry.[6] But during later centuries the three oratorical styles would be formally appropriated to three genres of poetry: to eclogue the low, to georgic the middle, to epic the lofty.[7]

The whole Graeco-Roman system of verbal rhetoric receives its eclectic, serenely sophisticated, and classically retrospective statement about a century after Horace in Books VIII and IX of a kind of politician's and pleader's encyclopedia, the *Institutio Oratoria* in twelve books, by the lawyer and laureate rhetorician[8] Quintilian. In the century after that rhetoric moved once more, as in the century after Aristotle, with Hegesias of Magnesia, in the direction of perfumery, euphuism, Asiatic conceit. A chief authority was Hermogenes of Tarsus. The period is known to historians as the Second Sophistic.

V

THE "figures" noticed by Longinus tend to have to do with abnormalities of syntax and other peculiarities of structure: *asundeton* (absence of conjunctions), *huperbaton* (inversion), changes of number, person, tense, *periphrasis* (a roundabout way of saying something), rhetorical question. It may even seem to a modern reader something like an inversion of values to dignify these twists by the name of "figure" when the queen of figures (the chief rhetorical concern of Aristotle) metaphor, along with comparison and simile, is treated under the head of "diction." The whole distinction between the third and fourth Longinian sources

[4] See Charles S. Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic* (New York, 1924), pp. 56–7; *Demetrius On Style*, ed. W. R. Roberts (Cambridge, 1902), p. 22; Donald Lemen Clark, "John Milton and 'the fitted stile of lofty, mean, or lowly,'" *Seventeenth-Century News*, XI (Winter, 1953), No. 4, *Milton Society Supplement*, 5–9.

[5] "*Quot sunt officia oratoris tot sunt genera dicendi: subtile in probando, modicum in delectando, vehemens in flectendo*" (*Orator* XXI).

[6] *Orator* XIX–XX.

[7] Cf. *post* Chapter 8, p. 146; Chapter 16, p. 342.

[8] Under Vespasian.

of the sublime, diction (*phrasis*) and figures (*schēmata*), is indeed one which may be difficult to explain, and its status is not improved by the nearly parallel or overlapping subdistinction which appears under the head of "figures" themselves: between those of expression (*lexis*) and those of thought (*noēsis*). A certain technical conventionalism marks the rhetorical analysis of Longinus, a limitation through dealing with inherited concepts. This can be seen too in other parts of the essay, for instance, under the head of "great thoughts," the first source of elevation, where we come upon such an anomaly as "amplification" (or padding out an idea). Nevertheless, Longinus is an extraordinary rhetorician—and for the reason that he is trying to put two sides of a problem together—one side, the technicalities and definitions of the rhetoric which was current, and the other side, a sense of something indefinable which he calls "elevation" and which he attempts actually to specify in a nonrhetorical dimension, that of the great soul and its thoughts and passions. Whether these latter are something observable in the poem itself—or something outside the poem which causes the poem—or again something which the poem causes in its audience—is not clearly indicated. At times therefore the equation between the passions of the soul and verbal rhetoric tends to take the form of a shortcircuit or, as we have suggested, a diagonal escape back and forth between tricky technique and passionate inspiration, artful poem and natural man. This is most evident in the several treatments of extravagance in figures and diction. What is it that makes us swallow a violent hyperbole (Ch. XXXVIII)? or a far-fetched metaphor (Ch. XXXII)? Nothing else but "strong and timely passion," or "deeds and passions which verge on transport." Such passion (ours or the poet's may not be clear) is a kind of lenitive and remedy (*panakeia*) for hyperbole and a palliative (*alexipharmakon*) for metaphor.[9] "Art (*technē*)," says Longinus in another place, "is perfect (*teleios*) when it seems to be nature, and nature hits the mark when she contains art hidden within her."[1] And one of the main points of apology in his opening chapters concerns the difficulty of conceiving an *art* for so natural and spontaneous a performance as the sublime (*ei estin hupsous tis ē bathous technē*). On the main premises of the essay one might well argue that works of nature are only enfeebled and wizened by rules of art (*tais technologiais kataskeleteuomena*). But Longinus undertakes precisely to defend art against such hypernaturalistic charges.

> While nature as a rule is free (*autonomon*) and independent in matters of passion and elevation, yet she is wont not to act at random and utterly without system (*amethodon*). Further, na-

[9] Cf. *alexēma* (Ch. XVI), a palliative for the figure of adjuration.
[1] Ch. XXII, on the figure of inversion or *huperbaton*.

> ture is the original and vital underlying principle in all cases, but system (*methodos*) can define limits and fitting seasons, and can also contribute the safest rules for use and practice. II

On the view suggested by such words as *panakeia* and *alexipharmakon*, however, we seem actually to have something more like nature blurring the vision, soothing our doubts and irritations, covering over and apologizing for the ineptitude of art. We may be moved to ask: What has art done for nature? Do the metaphors and hyperboles and other paraphernalia of art correspond somehow to nature in her phase of emotion? Do they provoke her emotions? Or do they express them? Longinus does not say any of these things—though to say any one of them might be a bolder critical statement than he actually makes and would reverse the direction of what actually seems to be a retreat from the analyzable rhetorical figures into a reservoir of emotive origins and effects which somewhat vaporously defies inspection.

This kind of choice appears under another form in a section of the essay which in later ages was to be among the most often echoed. Chapters XXXIII—XXXVI are a digression from the technical theme of metaphor for the sake of drawing a strong contrast between scrupulous technical correctness and a grandeur of soul which is conceived as careless.

> . . . I am well aware that lofty genius is far removed from flawlessness; for invariable accuracy incurs the risk of pettiness, and in the sublime, as in great fortunes, there must be something which is overlooked. It may be necessarily the case that low and average natures remain as a rule free from failing and in greater safety because they never run a risk or seek to scale the heights, while great endowments prove insecure because of their very greatness.
>
> . . . does Eratosthenes in the *Erigone* (a little poem which is altogether free from flaw) show himself a greater poet than Archilochus with the rich and disorderly abundance which follows in his train and with that outburst of the divine spirit within him which it is difficult to bring under the rules of law? Once more: in lyric poetry would you prefer to be Bacchylides rather than Pindar? And in tragedy to be Ion of Chios rather than—Sophocles? XXXIII
>
> In reply . . . to the writer who maintains that the faulty Colossus is not superior to the Spearman of Polycleitus, it is obvious to remark . . . that in art the utmost exactitude is admired, but

> that grandeur is admired in the works of nature; and that it is by nature that man is a being gifted with speech. XXXVI

There is an obvious truth about all this (that if a poet writes a great play, an *Oedipus* or a *Lear*, marred by a faulty line or even a faulty scene, he has achieved more than if he wrote a good sonnet, even a *very* good sonnet), but this obvious truth seems to get out of hand, in the author's enthusiasm, and to sweep him along to something very like an implication that mediocrity is on the whole apt to be flawless, and swashbuckling genius strongly, if forgivably, inclined to make mistakes. A disclaimer to the effect that the blunders of Homer, Demosthenes, and Plato add up to only "an infinitesimal fraction" of their works (XXXVI) scarcely stems the main sweep of the argument, which reaches its flood in statements such as those we have quoted, that the abundance of Archilochus is disorderly and lawless, that art and exactitude stand against grandeur and nature, that great authors despise persistent accuracy (XXXV). Two possibilities, that a mediocre writer might be full of faults and partly because of these faults might be mediocre, and that a great writer might be faultless (or rather that his greatness might be in proportion to the fewness of his faults) are scarcely given enough weight.[2] The single sublime and happy touch (XXXVI), a notion that echoes one of the original emphases of the essay,[3] plays a greater role in redeeming the mistakes of genius than any greatness or perfection achieved through a whole structure. The discussion could scarcely countenance the idea that in a large literary work (as in a large practical enterprise, say the building of a jet bomber compared to the building of a wheelbarrow) a relevant mistake—one that is really a mistake—will be the more catastrophic. If we conceive both *perfection* and *grandeur* as qualities which ought to be resident in a poem itself, the antagonism suggested by Longinus seems bound to be troublesome. It is on the whole perhaps easier to read this celebrated digression upon genius and perfection as part of the author's prevailing tendency to seek a route of escape from the technicalities of the poem itself (where his spirit withers) to the great soul of the poet (in the idea of which he rejoices). The alignment of *perfection*, not against any *grandeur* in the poem itself, but against a godlike soul or "genius" in the author, is strongly invited. At a later date, from the *Spectators* of Addison to the *Seven Lamps* of Ruskin, this antithesis, with all the ambiguity of its bearing on the actual work of art, was to enjoy, despite the protests of a few hard heads like Macaulay, a triumphant vogue in English criticism.

[2] There is indeed the statement that Lysias is inferior to Plato not only in degree of excellences but by reason of his faults (XXV).

[3] "Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt" (I).

VI

One of the most extraordinary features of the essay on *The Sublime* is the variety of criteria, the number of approaches to poetry, which it manages to include: not only the main three, the transport of the audience, the genius of the author, the devices of rhetoric—but in passing the democratic idea that great poetry is that which pleases all and always (VII)[4] and again a further variation on the subject-object relation, the most spectacular or operatic part of the essay (in Chapters IX and XXXV), the idea of physical grandeur as the counterpart of psychic. There may be some danger of our supposing that the author means that the sublime state of soul is to be measured by the magnitude of the external objects mentioned in a poem. For instance, by the battle of the gods in *Iliad* XX and XXI:

> You see, my friend, how the earth is torn from its foundations, Tartarus itself is laid bare, the whole world is upturned and parted asunder, and all things together—heaven and hell, things mortal and things immortal—share in the conflict and the perils of that battle. IX

We are perhaps saved from an over-simple interpretation of this passage if we notice the warning that these things must be taken allegorically (*kat' allēgorian*), that Homer makes gods of men and men of gods, and that hence even superior to the battle of the gods are passages which represent the gods as pure and great and undefiled. But another and more eloquent passage, in Chapter XXXV (part of that digression on genius and accuracy), hangs out the fiery symbols more brightly and became to later ages one of the most attractive spots in the essay.

> . . . Nature has appointed us men to be no base or ignoble animals; but when she ushers us into the vast universe as into some great assembly, to be as it were spectators of the mighty whole and the keenest aspirants for honour, forthwith she implants in our souls the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and more divine than we. Wherefore not even the entire universe suffices for the thought and contemplation within the reach of the human mind, but our imaginations often pass beyond the bounds of space, and if we survey our life on every side and see how much more it everywhere abounds in what is striking, and great, and beautiful, we shall soon discern the purpose of our birth. This is why, by a sort of natural impulse, we admire not

[4] Cf. XXXVI, and Atkins, II, 236. Sikes, *The Greek View of Poetry*, p. 236, quotes St. Vincent of Lerins (d. 304): *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.* See his *Commonitorium*, ed. R. S. Moxon (Cambridge, 1915), II, 3.

> the small streams, useful and pellucid though they be, but the Nile, the Danube, or the Rhine, and still more the Ocean. Nor do we view the tiny flame of our own kindling (guarded in lasting purity as its light ever is) with greater awe than the celestial fires though they are often shrouded in darkness; nor do we deem it a greater marvel than the craters of Etna, whose eruptions throw up stones from its depths and great masses of rock, and at times pour forth rivers of pure and unmixed subterranean fire. In all such matters we may say that what is useful or necessary men regard as commonplace, while they reserve their admiration for that which is astounding.

Here, it is true, Longinus is talking a language of teleology and religious psychology. He is speaking directly about the place of man in the universe, rather than making rules for literary composition. But in the context of the whole essay the passage might easily be given a direct literary application. It has been easy to assimilate to another famous piece of first-century literary exhortation, that of the old Bohemian poet Eumolpus in the *Satyricon* of Nero's Arbiter Elegantiarum, Petronius. *Praecipitandus est liber spiritus.* This is a plea for Homeric machinery and supernatural excitement (*ambages deorumque ministeria*), after the mere military realism of Lucan's *Civil Wars.* Put Petronius and Longinus together, and you have something like the spirit with which Dryden was to defend Heroic Plays in 1672 and a little later opera. Take the Longinus of *Peri Hupsous,* Chapter XXXV, alone ("Wherefore not even the entire universe suffices for the thought and contemplation within the reach of the human mind, but our imaginations often pass beyond the bounds of space . . ."), and we have a very good start toward the "sublime" in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in 1790.

VII

THE same quest for the indefinable, no doubt, gives the rhetorical analysis itself here and there a more subtle turn. It is the mark of a rhetorician who knows the difficulties and the limits of his metier to observe that sublimity must "leave in the mind more food for reflection than the words seem to convey" (VII), and that "the very fact that there are some elements of expression which are in the hands of nature alone, can be learned from no other source than art" (II). Among the preliminary statements of the first chapter, close to that about the "transport" of the audience, occurs a statement that "Elevation (*hupsos*) consists in a certain distinction and excellence of expression" (*akrotēs kai exochē tis logōn*).[5] The author of a recent essay on Longinus has suggested that

[5] Cf. XXX: "Beautiful words are in very truth the peculiar light of thought."

the key to understanding this "excellence" lies in the fifth source of "elevation," that is, composition (*sunthesis*), or "harmony," as the term may perhaps be translated.[6] *Sunthesis* had been distinguished by Aristotle (*Rhetoric* III, 5) from simple diction or single words, though his observations under the two heads show not much difference. *Sunthesis* seems to have been emphasized by at least one Hellenistic critic, Heracleodorus.[7] And the term, as we have seen, appears in the title of one of the best poetico-rhetorical treatises of the century preceding Longinus, the *Peri Suntheseōs Onomatōn* of Dionysius, though there it seems to have a fairly generic and perfunctory meaning, simply the "management" of words. Longinus himself devotes relatively little space, Chapters XXXIX–XL, to his fifth source, and he appears to mean by the term *sunthesis* the special feature of verbal order which is usually called *rhythm*.[8] From this alone not a great deal might be deduced, at least not a very comprehensive theory of verbal ordonnance—not very much about any indefinable exactitudes of style or dynamic interdependence between style and content. But one other and more celebrated passage of the *Peri Hupsous* may be adduced to support such an emphasis. Chapter X, on the choice and combination of striking materials, contains the passage which speaks of the dazzling intensity and complexity of Sappho's Ode to Anactoria.

> Are you not amazed how at one instant she summons, as though they were all alien from herself and dispersed, soul, body, ears, tongue, eyes, colour? She unites contradictions. She is, at one and the same time, hot and cold, in her senses and out of them. She is either terrified or at the point of death. The effect desired is that not one passion only should be seen in her, but a concourse of the passions (*pathōn de sunodos*). All such things occur in the case of lovers, but it is, as I said, the selection of the most striking of them and their combination into a single whole that has produced the singular excellence of the passage.

This is a long way from the figures of thought and diction in the *Ad Herennium* or in Book VIII of Quintilian's *Institutio* and even from the acute observations of Aristotle on metaphor and pun. It is a kind of statement which may be extrapolated in various directions—perhaps even in that suggested by another recent commentator,[9] who sees the Longinian *ekstasis* as an adjustment, harmony, or gratifying integration

[6] Allen Tate, "Longinus and the 'New Criticism,'" in *The Forlorn Demon* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 131–51.

[7] Atkins, I, 174.

[8] Chapter I explicitly prefers the momentary lightning flash of sublimity to the "hard-won result . . . of the whole texture of the composition" (*tou holou tōn logōn huphous molis*).

[9] T. R. Henn, *Longinus and English Criticism* (Cambridge, 1934).

of impulses, much like that to which Messrs. Ogden and Richards once gave the name of "synaesthesis." [1] In any event Longinus must be saluted as a lover of great literature who knew something about how to cope with what was for him the very palpable, in fact inescapable, barbed wire of contemporary rhetoric. As Horace had subdued the theory of poetic words to a decorum of urbanity, conversation, idiom and satire, Longinus heightened it to a decorum of transport.

SUPPLEMENT

I never got my lips in the Horse's spring, and I can remember dreaming no dreams on either peak of Parnassus—not for such reasons do I suddenly come forth a poet. The Heliconian ladies and the waters of Pirene that produce the library pallor are not my dish. I leave these to the gentlemen whose busts are graced with the ivy tendrils. I venture out among the holy professional poets like a half-citizen at a village festival. What teaches the parrot his "Polly-want-a-cracker" and the magpie to ape being a man? That master of arts, that generous dispenser of genius—the Belly. Most skilful in removing obstacles to speech! If only they could take in the lovely, meretricious flash of money, what poets and poetesses, ravens and magpies, you would hear—singing the pure Horse nectar.

—Persius, Prologue to the *Satires*

What I should like to stress is the fact that in creative intuition we have the primary rule to which, in the case of the fine arts, the whole fidelity, obedience, and heedfulness of the artist must be committed. I also should like to stress the fact that between this primary, primordial, primitive rule and all other rules of making, however indispensable they may be, there exists an essential difference, so to speak infinite, as between heaven and earth. All other rules are of the earth, they deal with particular ways of operation in the making of the work. But this primary rule is a heavenly rule, because it deals with the very conception, in the bosom of the spirit, of the work to be engendered in beauty. If creative intuition is lacking, a work can be perfectly made, and it is nothing; the artist has nothing to say. If creative intuition is present, and passes, to some extent, into the work, the work exists and speaks to us, even if it is imperfectly made and proceeds from a man

c'ha l'habito de l'arte a man che trema,

—who has the habit of art and a hand which shakes.

At the summit of artistic activity, and for one who has long traveled along the road of the rules, finally there is no longer any road. For the sons of

[1] C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, and James Wood, *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (New York, 1925), pp. 75–6.

God are under no law. Just as finally the unique law of the perfect soul, according to the saying of St. Augustine (not literally of him, but it does not matter), is "*ama et fac quod vis*"—love and do what you want—so the unique rule of the perfect artist is finally: "Cling to your creative intuition, and do what you want."

—Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (Bollingen Series XXXV, 1, New York, 1953), Chapter II, p. 60, by permission of Pantheon Books Inc.

But the inner and most important distinction between the Sublime and Beautiful is, certainly, as follows. (Here, as we are entitled to do, we only bring under consideration in the first instance the sublime in natural Objects; for the sublime of Art is always limited by the conditions of agreement with Nature.) Natural beauty (which is self-subsisting) brings with it a purposiveness in its form by which the object seems to be, as it were, pre-adapted to our Judgement, and thus constitutes in itself an object of satisfaction. On the other hand, that which excites in us, without any reasoning about it, but in the mere apprehension of it, the feeling of the sublime, may appear as regards its form to violate purpose in respect of the Judgement, to be unsuited to our presentative faculty, and, as it were to do violence to the Imagination; and yet it is judged to be only the more sublime.

The mind feels itself *moved* in the representation of the Sublime in nature; whilst in aesthetical judgements about the Beautiful it is in *restful* contemplation. This movement may (especially in its beginnings) be compared to a vibration, i.e. to a quickly alternating attraction towards, and repulsion from, the same Object.

Bold, overhanging, and as it were threatening, rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such like; these exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might. But the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided only that we are in security; and we readily call these objects sublime because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height, and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature.

—Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (1790), trans. J. H. Bernard (2d ed., London, 1931), pp. 102–3, 120, 125, by permission of Macmillan & Company Ltd.

Kant wrote in terms which presaged a Wagnerian view of the Rhine on a foggy night.—Student paper, 1950

CHAPTER 7

THE NEO-PLATONIC CONCLUSION: PLOTINUS AND SOME MEDIEVAL THEMES

§ *place of Plotinus in critical history—II. the philosophy of his* Enneads, *its relevance to aesthetics: unity and being, the good and the beautiful, ugliness and evil, matter, negation, beauty and reality in* Enneads *I, vi and V, viii—III. problems posed by Plotinus: unity and simplicity in relation to diversity, Stoic symmetry and brightness, beauty of parts, light, vision, intelligibility, subject and object, the problem of various beautiful forms, the two pieces of stone—IV. St. Augustine,* beate contemplari, *harmony of number, "angelic imagination," unity* in spite of *diversity,* obiter dicta *suggesting the contrary, symbols in Scripture —V. Aquinas, substantive ontology and theology (conflict of neo-Platonism and Christianity), "beauty" as a Divine Name, as form and intelligence,* quae visa placent, tria requiruntur, *splendor of form, beauty distinguished from the good, aesthetic detachment, analogy, beauty a transcendental, beauty and art, poetry in relation to logic and rhetoric—VI. Neo-Platonic aesthetic through the ages, the 19th century, James Joyce, cognitive and affective axes of theory* §

HISTORY OF TASTE AND LITERARY CRITICISM HAS LITTLE TO SAY ABOUT the thinker with whom we conclude our account of classicism. He is a theorist of *to kalon* in its purest sense rather than of *mimēsis* or of the *utile* and the *dulce*. All the other classical theories which we have seen have been considered by a great modern aesthetic

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philosopher[1] to be less than "aesthetic," defective either through simple hedonism or through hedonism joined with didacticism; but the theory we are now to look at is considered by the same philosopher to be something *more* than aesthetic, a mystical "excess" or ascent into the boundless, beyond criticism. Not only peripatetic definition, genre, and technicality, so friendly to the comic and satiric mirror of daily life, but their source in Aristotelian realism are now of vastly diminished account. Plotinus, the founder of the Roman school of neo-Platonism, who came to Rome from the school of Alexandria in 244 and died at Rome in 270, was a man who was able to hurl back sorceries upon those of a jealous rival; his presiding spirit, evoked by an Egyptian priest in the Temple of Isis at Rome, turned out to be a divinity; and several times in his life he experienced the trance of mystic communion with the Absolute. When he was asked to sit for a portrait, he replied: "Is it not enough to have to bear the mere simulacrum (*eidōlon*) of reality in which nature has wrapped me, without consenting to perpetuate the image of an image, as if that were worth contemplating?" It is through an emphasis on divinity, on the Divine One, as the radiating source and constitutive principle of all Being, that neo-Platonism, and especially the philosophy of Plotinus, makes its peculiar contribution to aesthetics.

II

THE philosophy of Plotinus is contained in his six *Enneads*, or sets of nine essays each, which after the death of Plotinus his disciple and biographer Porphyry arranged and edited in an order of ascent from ethical and aesthetic matters up to the absolute or One. It is a philosophy of Being through emanation (*tolma*) from, and return (*epistrophē*) to, the Divine One. There is this world, an appearance, as for Plato, and there is the reality which is Yonder. The grades of a kind of trinity, Soul (*psuchē*), intelligence (*nous*), and Oneness (*to hen*), occur as microcosmic and macrocosmic counterparts: in the individual things of this world, in the whole world, and in the Yonder. (In effect a kind of stratified or hierarchical universe is projected from our introspective awareness of our own consciousness.) An analogy to the generations of the Hesiodic theogeny, the Uranian, Chronian, and Olympian, was noticed of course by Plotinus but barely countenanced. The divine soul, looking toward the world, dreams it up or creates and sustains it. Looking toward intelligence, this soul reflects the ideas of Intelligence, the forms of the world. And Intelligence, looking up toward the One, is transcended in the One, the very principle of form or Being, the first

[1] Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (London, 1922), pp. 65, 156.

thing (*to prōton*), and hence the good (*to agathon*). The One is so pure and simple and primal [2] that we ascend to a concept of it only by the way of abstraction or negation.

> But possess yourself of it by the very elimination of Being and you hold a marvel.—*Ennead* III, viii, 10 [3]

The more empirical aspects of this reasoning and its most immediate relevance to aesthetics appear in passages of the following tenor:

> It is in virtue of unity that beings are beings. This is equally true of things whose existence is primal and of all that are in any degree to be numbered among beings. What could exist at all except as one thing? Deprived of unity, a thing ceases to be what it is called: no army unless as a unity: a chorus, a flock, must be one thing. Even house and ship demand unity, one house, one ship: unity gone neither remains.
>
> Take plant and animal; the material form stands a unity; fallen from that into a litter of fragments, the things have lost their being; what was is no longer there; it is replaced by quite other things—as many others, precisely, as possess unity.
>
> —*Ennead* VI, ix, 1

> Where the Ideal-Form has entered . . . it has rallied confusion into co-operation: it has made the sum one harmonious coherence: for the Idea is a unity and what it molds must come to unity as far as multiplicity may.
>
> And on what has thus been compacted to unity, Beauty enthrones itself, giving itself to the parts as to the sum. . . . Thus for an illustration, there is the beauty conferred by craftsmanship, of all a house with all its parts, and the beauty which some natural quality may give to a single stone.—*Ennead* I, vi, 2

But if One is Being and the Good and the Beautiful, and if nothing can even be unless it is one, how do we explain the operation of an apparently contrary principle in the world of physical things with which we are most familiar? What makes so much failure, evil, and ugliness? How are such things even conceivable? Philosophers have devised three kinds of answer to this question: the dualistic or Manichaean, which says that evil is an independent, positive, active principle fighting the

[2] "Yet again, the One is prior to the intelligence. For the intelligence, though unmoved, is yet not unity: in knowing itself it is object to its own activity" (Proclus, *Institutio Theologica*, 20).

[3] The *Works* of Plotinus are quoted throughout this chapter from the translation of Stephen MacKenna, 5 vols., London, 1917–1930, by permission of Faber and Faber Limited and Pantheon Books Inc. Proclus is quoted from E. R. Dodds, *Select Passages Illustrating Neo-Platonism* (London, 1923), by permission of The Macmillan Company.

good (Ahriman the Persian god of darkness against Ormazd the god of light); the neutral or Spinozistic, which says that good and evil are relative to our own pleasures and sufferings only and that the substantial and ultimate reality is beyond Good and Evil; and the Neo-Platonic and Christian scholastic, which says that evil per se is really nothing, but that it manifests itself as an absence of something where something ought to be. If we conceive that the form or unity or being of a given something has to work against or upon, or dominate, something else, we may readily slip a little way toward Manichaean dualism and conceive that something else to be "matter," a kind of potentiality or thing inconceivably nothing in itself if we try to conceive it purely—but nevertheless a principle of negation and evil. This is approximately the form which the theory of evil according to Plotinus assumes. Matter (*hulē*), said Plotinus, is multiplicity, the principle of falling apart and being nothing, the negative or nothingness which the One conquers into form and being. We may conceive unity (form or reality) and its opposite, matter, to be like a pair of intersecting cones—as in the world system of W. B. Yeats.[4] Each vanishes to a point at the base of the other. Again, invoking a Plotinian metaphor of the luminous (about which we shall have more to say within a few pages), we may conceive the universe as a series of concentric rainbows, the One in the center as pure white light, radiating through circles of increasingly dark color, to blackness at the outer limit. Matter is the last, lowest, and least emanation of the creative power of the All-Soul—the fringe or fraying-out limit at which the transmission of ideas and unity and the generative power of the soul come to a halt. (In the sphere of individual moral consciousness an analogy to "matter" appears in the concept of "environment," so far as that checks our purely rational or autonomous acts.[5]) Plotinus came near to making matter a kind of recalcitrant and obstructive low-grade stuff—a clay or powder—hence a positive principle of amorphousness.

> An ugly thing is something that has not been entirely mastered by pattern, that is by reason, the matter not yielding at all points and in all respects to Ideal-form.—*Ennead* I, vi, 2

A later Athenian Neo-Platonist, Proclus (who has been called the Aristotle of the movement), was to put the doctrine of evil as negation in a safer form.

[4] "If we think of the vortex attributed to Discord by Empedocles as formed by circles diminishing until they are nothing, and of the opposing sphere attributed to Concord as forming from itself an opposing vortex, the apex of each vortex in the middle of the other's base, we have the fundamental symbol of my instructors" (William Butler Yeats, *A Vision*, London, 1937, p. 68). "My instructors used . . . a double cone or vortex, preferring to consider subjectivity and objectivity as intersecting states struggling one against the other" (p. 71).

[5] *Ennead* I, viii, 7, 15.

> If Evil be wholly independent of God, then there is plurality of First Principles, Good and Evil arising from two several sources. . . . we can neither introduce a Form of things evil, nor yet consider Matter to be their cause. . . . Accordingly, we must . . . represent them [evils] as a side-product of certain partial and dispersed causes. . . . If a body is infected with Evil it doubtless embraces diverse elements which do not observe their just relative proportions, and thus, because every part would have the mastery, distemper is generated as a side-product.
>
> —*In Rempublicam*, 358

We find Plotinus in the earlier of two essays which he wrote on beauty,[6] *Ennead*, I, vi, strongly inclined, like his master Plato, to depreciate physical beauty, or at best to value it as an approach to the real beauty of intelligence in the Yonder.

> He that has the strength, let him arise and withdraw into himself, foregoing all that is known by the eyes, turning away forever from the material beauty that once made his joy. When he perceives those shapes of grace that show in body, let him not pursue: he must know them for copies, vestiges, shadows, and hasten away towards That they tell of. For if anyone follow what is like a beautiful shape playing over water—is there not a myth telling in symbol of such a dupe, how he sank into the depths of the current and was swept away to nothingness?
>
> —*Ennead* I, vi, 8

> Therefore the Soul must be trained—to the habit of remarking, first, all noble pursuits, then the works of beauty produced not by the labour of the arts but by the virtue of men known for their goodness: lastly, you must search the souls of those that have shared these beautiful forms.—*Ennead* I, vi, 9

This we might say is the *Symposium* of Plato revisited. Perhaps the tone is even more lofty—and somewhat more severe. Yet it required little more than a shift of accent for Plotinus to distinguish himself from the Gnostic puritans of that era, the philosophers who were carrying the distinction between matter and formal reality to the point of making apparent natural beauty an actual ugliness and evil.

[6] The identity of Being, Good, and Beauty, and of Negation, Evil and Ugliness is to be assumed throughout the discussion. "We may even say that Beauty *is* the authentic-Existents and Ugliness is the Principle contrary to Existence: and the Ugly is also the primal evil; therefore its contrary is at once good and beautiful, or is Good and Beauty: and hence the one method will discover to us the Beauty-Good and the Ugliness-Evil. . . . the Intellectual-Principle . . . is preeminently the manifestation of Beauty; through the Intellectual-Principle Soul is beautiful."—*Ennead* I, vi, 6

> Evil is not alone: by virtue of the nature of Good, the power of Good, it is not evil alone: it appears necessarily, bound around with bonds of Beauty, like some captive bound in fetters of gold.—*Ennead* I, viii, 15

> What geometrician or arithmetician could fail to take pleasure in the symmetries, correspondences and principles of order observed in visible things? . . . Surely no one seeing the loveliness lavish in the world of sense—this vast orderliness, the Form which the stars even in their remoteness display—no one could be so dull-witted, so immovable, as not to be carried by all this to recollection, and gripped by reverent awe in the thought of all this, so great, sprung from that greatness.
>
> —*Ennead* II, ix, 16

And if nature may be countenanced—as an excellent mirror or image —what of art? It would have been greatly to our discomfort had so radical a philosopher of unity and being as Plotinus not written in *Ennead* V, viii (one of his later essays if the chronology of Porphyry is correct) a defence of worldly beauty which was catholic enough to find room even for the products of art.[7] This he manages by saying that artists, far from being at a disadvantage, as on the Platonic view of double removal from reality, actually enjoy a more than usual divine radiation of *nous*, a more than usually full participation in the Divine Intelligence and realization of the beautiful reality of the Yonder. It is a simple exchange of basic analogies, and in the rarefied atmosphere of the Plotinian context it may seem almost arbitrary. But it makes the difference between two worlds of literary theory.

> Still the arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects; for, to begin with, these natural objects are themselves imitations; then, we must recognize that they [the arts] give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the Ideas from which nature derives, and, furthermore, that much of their work is all their own; they are molders of beauty and add where nature is lacking. Thus Pheidias wrought the Zeus upon no model among things of sense but by apprehending what form Zeus must take if he chose to become manifest to sight.—*Ennead* V, viii, 1

If we are willing to give this passage the benefit of some 1,400 years' anachronism, to place it momentarily in a context shining back from, let us say, the Germany of the Schlegels and the England of Coleridge

[7] The concession is made more cursorily in the paragraph of II, ix from which we have just quoted.

and Shelley (and such a procedure can be by no means contrary to the spirit of a really critical and theoretical inquiry), we may agree with those historians who have already proclaimed Plotinus as the earliest systematic philosopher of the creative imagination.[8]

III

ENNEAD V, viii is a remarkable essay in general aesthetics, not only for its Platonic eloquence and lofty metaphysics, but for certain more analytic problems which it is likely to pose to a thoughtful reading. We have seen that the emphasis of the Plotinian system lies upon a kind of unity which we can conceive as the triumph of an ordering principle over multiplicity and diversity of parts. It is even difficult to conceive this triumph except as occurring through and in virtue of the diversity of the parts. The Plotinian term "simple" (*haplous*), a modern editor of Plotinus explains, may describe either *absence* of *internal differentiation* (as with the simplicity or unity of a pebble) or precisely the opposite, a high degree of *internal differentiation*—in other words, organic unity (as with the unity of a living body).[9] The kind of unity and intelligibility enjoyed by the Plotinian object of knowledge is furthermore not that of a species, but that of an individual, and of an individual so intensely organized as to be microcosmic, an implication of the whole universe.

> Each member shall remain what it is, distinctly apart; yet all is to form, as far as possible, a complete unity so that whatever comes into view shall show as it were the surface of the orb over all, bringing immediately with it the vision, on the one plane, of the sun and of all the stars with earth and sea and all living things as if exhibited upon a transparent globe.
>
> —*Ennead* V, viii, 9

Yet the system of Plotinus, in another of its emphases, transcends, as we have seen, the heterogeneity of this world in an ascent to a divine One that is so simply One as to be conceivable only by the method of abstraction and negation. As the mind turns from this abstracted and

[8] The specifically aesthetic idea and the same example occur also in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* written in the same century by Flavius Philostratus. "For imitation will fashion what it has seen, but imagination goes on to what it has not seen, which it will assume as the standard of reality. . . . If you have envisaged the character of Zeus, you must see him with the firmament and the seasons and the stars, as Pheidias strove to do in this statue." VI, 19. The passage is part of an argument that Greek plastic art rose above the animal symbolism of the Egyptians to an expression of divinity in the human form. Flavius Philostratus of Tarsus (c. A.D. 172–245) was a sophist who taught rhetoric at Athens and Rome.

[9] Dodds, pp. 45–6, notes to *Ennead* VI, vii, 13–15.

severe concept back to the diverse and composite world of nature and art, certain perplexities may arise.

Among the criteria of beauty known to later antiquity two of the most respected were those emphasized by Stoic philosophers and litterateurs: symmetry and brightness of color.[1] But how *could* symmetry be part of the definition of beauty? Think, says Plotinus, what that doctrine leads us to.

> Only a compound can be beautiful, never anything devoid of parts; and only a whole; the several parts will have beauty, not in themselves, but only as working together to give a comely total. Yet beauty in an aggregate demands beauty in details; it cannot be constructed out of ugliness; its law must run throughout.—*Ennead* I, vi, 1 [2]

> All the loveliness of color and even the light of the sun, being devoid of parts and so not beautiful by symmetry, must be ruled out of the realm of beauty. And how comes gold to be a beautiful thing? And lightning by night, and the stars, why are these so fair?—*Ennead* I, vi, 1

Such questions may be translated all too easily into the language of the practical literary critic. How many lines of a poem, we might ask ourselves, do we read before we begin to form some opinion of its merit? How many scenes of a play, before knowing whether we enjoy it? Certain short phrases have, or seem to have, poetic power—the sudden flashes of the sublime about which Longinus spoke—the sure "touchstones" or sovereign fragments by which Matthew Arnold in a distant post-Platonic age would propose the ordering of criticism. Our choice between a holistic view of art and a connoisseurship of the *disjecta membra* may not be able altogether to escape the fact that in one of its most natural, primitive, and perennial uses, the term *beautiful* does apply to simple and bright and smooth objects—gold rather than rusty iron, a polished topaz rather than a lump of mud. The Stoic doctrine of charming color may seem, when confronted with such examples, not very profoundly integrated with that of symmetry. If nowadays we refuse to entertain any such conception as that earlier Greek one of *kosmos* [3]—the word "purple" or the word "topaz" as a

[1] Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* IV, 13. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XIII, 3: "The essential characters composing beauty are order, symmetry, and definition."

[2] Cf. the statement of Coleridge, written not without influence of Neo-Platonic reading, but shaded too by the Kantian distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable: A poem is a species of composition which proposes "to itself such delight from the *whole*, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part*" (*Biographia Literaria*, XIV).

[3] Cf. Lane Cooper, "The Verbal 'Ornament' (KOSMOS) in Aristotle's Art of Poetry," *Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Edward Kennard Rand*, ed.

valuable ornament in a poem—or to adopt the thought of the sophist Hippias in the Platonic dialogue, "Gold is what is beautiful,"—nevertheless we do to some extent inevitably recognize the affinity between the beautiful and the brilliant. We do so, for instance, in the very metaphors we choose for commending works of art—bright or brilliant or clean or clear, we are likely to say, not muddy, or dirty or drab.

The reconciliation which Plotinus himself effects between simple brightness and complex intelligible order as criteria of beauty is based on a metaphor that runs through all Platonic philosophy, beginning with the great image of the dark cave and the fire of knowledge in the *Republic* and the analogy of sun and eyesight to truth and intelligence.

> The beauty of colour is also the outcome of a Unification. It derives from shape, from the conquest of the darkness inherent in matter by the pouring-in of light, the unembodied, which is a Rational-Principle and an Ideal-Form.
>
> Hence it is that fire itself is splendid beyond all material bodies, holding the rank of Ideal Principle to the other elements, making ever upwards, the subtlest and sprightliest of all bodies, as very near to the unembodied; itself alone admitting no other, all the others penetrated by it: for they take warmth but this is never cold; it has colour primally; they receive the Form of colour from it: hence the splendour of its light, the splendour that belongs to the Idea. And all that has resisted and is but uncertainly held by its light remains outside of beauty, as not having absorbed the plenitude of the Form or colour.—*Ennead*, I, vi, 3

In the Persian dualistic system, the god of light, Ormazd, is the principle of good; the god of darkness, Ahriman, the equally positive principle of evil. It is one of the insights of the Platonic Western mind to make darkness a negation, brightness an analogue of all that is positive—knowledge, form, being, Divinity.

> O Light eternal who only in thyself abidest, only
> thyself doest understand, and to thy self, self-
> understood, self-understanding, turnest love and smiling! [4]

L. W. Jones (New York, 1938), pp. 61–77. "Further, add words for fine raiment, as 'purple,' and armor, as 'corslet,' 'glaive,' and 'hauberk,' and all the noble names for things that delight the senses, particularly sight and hearing, as Aristotle notes, but also touch, taste, and smell, and delight the higher sensibilities, and for things with which men and women adorn themselves, their servants, their animals, their houses, public buildings, ships; 'jewel' and the names of jewels—'beryl,' 'topaz,' 'amethyst,' 'diamond,' 'coral,' 'pearl,' and 'ruby'; words for incense and perfume—'frankincense,' 'spices,' and 'myrrh'; beautiful words from music, 'music' itself, 'melody,' 'harmony,' 'choral,' 'canticle,' 'alleluia,' and the names of instruments, the harp, the flute. . . ." (pp. 70–1).

[4] *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 124–6, trans. Philip H. Wicksteed.

O luce eterna, che sola in te sidi,
sola t'intendi, e, da te intelleta
ed intendente te, ami ed arridi!

Hail holy Light, offspring of Heaven first-born,
Or of the Eternal coeternal beam.

Lo! thy dread Empire, CHAOS! is restored;
Light dies before thy uncreating word;
. . .
And universal darkness buries all.

The idea of brightness as intelligible form is closely connected with another classical aesthetic idea—found, for instance, in Plato's *Philebus* and *Hippias Major* and again in *Enneads* I, vi, 1—that Beauty is discerned chiefly by the senses of sight and hearing[5]—these being the highest or most intellectual senses and those through which we derive our most distinct ideas of pattern and, more abstractly and metaphysically, of "form." Plotinus takes it for granted that sight comes first. "Beauty addresses itself chiefly to sight."

Again the refined sensory experience of sight allies itself readily with the idea that human knowledge arises from some kind of interdependence between object and organ. "Thought and thing depend upon and correspond to each other."

> Never did the eye see the sun unless it had first become Sunlike, and never can the soul have vision of the First Beauty unless itself be beautiful.—*Enneads* I, vi, 9

Like alone sees like. Or as modern students of neo-Platonism, quoting Blake, are likely to put it.

> The sun's light when he unfolds it,
> Depends on the organ that beholds it.

Or, quoting Goethe:

> Did not the eye partake of sun,
> Sun would be darkness to our seeing;
> No splendour could from the divine be won
> Were God not part of mortal being.[6]

In the higher reaches of Plotinian thought, the idea of the brilliant intelligibility of all being blends into the idea that being *is* pure intelligibility

[5] Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* VIII, 5, and *ante* Chapter 2, pp. 26–7.

[6] Ludwig Lewisohn, *Goethe: The Story of a Man* (New York, c. 1949), II, 74, Lewisohn's translation from Goethe's *Zahme Xenien*, III, by permission of Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, Inc.

or is composed of ideas. "It is hard to work down to crude matter beneath all that sheathing of idea." [7]

Perhaps one of the chief questions about beauty which the system of Plotinus is likely to provoke a modern reader to ask will run somewhat as follows: Are all the perfect forms (*eidē*) equally good and beautiful? And if not, how do we know which sensible forms have more beauty than others? Is a peacock more beautiful than a goose? Is a worm or a warthog more beautiful than certain objects undoubtedly lower in the hierarchy of complex unities but more usually called beautiful, say a block of lapis lazuli or even a finely cut diamond? Plotinus himself has written two contrasting passages which present the problem succinctly. One, from *Ennead* I, vi, 2, we have quoted above:

> . . . there is the beauty, conferred by craftsmanship, of all a house with all its parts, and the beauty which some natural quality may give to a single stone.

The following appears in *Ennead* V, viii, 1:

> Suppose two blocks of stone lying side by side: one is unpatterned, quite untouched by art; the other has been minutely wrought by the craftsman's hands into some statue of God or man, a Grace or a Muse, or if a human being, not a portrait but a creation in which the sculptor's art has concentrated all loveliness.
>
> Now it must be seen that the stone thus brought under the artist's hand to the beauty of form is beautiful not as stone—for so the crude stone would be as pleasant—but in virtue of the form or idea introduced by art. This form is not in the material; it is in the designer before it enters the stone.

The stone as something already existent is a being and has a form of its own, a unity and beauty. But then to expound the stamping of form on the formlessness of sheer matter, we adopt the analogy of the image finely imposed upon the simple and unadorned piece of material. Form upon form. And how beautiful was the original form? And is something of it not lost in the carving? The theory of Plotinus does not start as a theory of beauty, much less as a theory of art or poems. It is a theory of the world and God, of all being and all knowing, and only as an incident

[7] *Ennead* V, viii, 7. *Ennead* I, vi, 3 bears a marked resemblance to the notion of closure or psychic completion of forms found today in Gestalt psychology and in general aesthetics. "So with the perceptive faculty: discerning in certain objects the Ideal-form which has bound and controlled shapeless matter, opposed in nature to Idea, seeing further stamped upon the common shapes some shape excellent above the common, it gathers into unity what still remains fragmentary, catches it up and carries it within, no longer a thing of parts, and presents it to the Ideal-Principle. . . ."

or an analogy does it find a place for art. The opposite procedure, to start by explicitly attempting a theory of art and to move away from that to a general epistemology,—that is, to try to explain art or beauty or poetry by a principle so broad that it explains everything else too—is a reversal, or mirror imaging, of neo-Platonism which appears in some forms of modern idealism and aesthetic and perhaps testifies to the toughness of the paradox posed by Plotinus.[8]

IV

THE ideas of Plotinus, though perhaps least likely of all ideas about aesthetics to be widely known or respected today, have had their subsequent career and their analogues—especially among Christian philosophers from about the time of Plotinus himself to the late middle ages. St. Augustine for instance had read Plotinus in a Latin translation, and as he shared with Plotinus the aim of combatting the several forms of dualism and Puritanism prevalent in the third and fourth centuries (he was frequently engaged, for instance, *Contra Manichaeos*), he gives us some rather close echoes of the neo-Platonic philosopher.

> Without unity nothing could exist. To be is no other than to be one; the more unity a thing has, so much the more being does it possess . . . no material object is really one because a body as such is indefinitely divisible, potentially, if not actually.[9]

> Any beautiful object whatsoever is more worthy of praise in its totality as a whole than in any one of its parts. So great is the power of integrity and unity that what pleases as a part pleases much more as a unified whole.[1]

The Plotinian affinity between subject and object is argued by Augustine at both the sensory and spiritual levels. The senses enjoy whatever is proportioned to them by simple reason of the principle that agreement always produces pleasure.[2] And the full aesthetic pleasure of delighted contemplation (*beate contemplari*) occurs in the presence of objects which are in harmony not only with the senses but with the whole na-

[8] See *post* Chapter 23, Benedetto Croce.

[9] *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae et de Moribus Manichaeorum* II, vi. Translations from Augustine in this paragraph are adopted from Immanuel Chapman, *Saint Augustine's Philosophy of Beauty* (New York, 1935); see esp. pp. 59, 61, 63. See the same author's "Some Aspects of St. Augustine's Philosophy of Beauty," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, I (Spring, 1941), 46–51. The Latin texts of St. Augustine may be consulted in J. C. Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, vols. XXXII and XXXIV (Paris, 1841, 1845).

[1] *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos* I, xxi.

[2] *De Vera Religione* I, xxxix; *De Musica* VI, xiii.

ture of man, especially with the mind as the ruler and interpreter of the senses.[3] In Augustine's treatise *De Musica* a line from a hymn by St. Ambrose, *Deus creator omnium*, furnishes the more analytic concepts—funneled as it were towards unity—of number, form, and order.[4] The heading of Book VI of the *De Musica*, "The ascent from rhythm in sense to the immortal rhythm which is in truth," [5] synopsizes the argument by which Augustine, returning to Pythagorean and Platonic ideas about number, performs for the aesthetic of sound a service analogous to that performed by Plotinus for the aesthetic of bright colors. Like Plotinus and even more like Socrates arguing the doctrine of recollection (*anamnēsis*) in the *Phaedo* and *Meno*, Augustine is at a loss to know how we derive from our actually imperfect material experiences the normative concepts of order and perfection. He maintains that we do not. Such criteria are supplied to our minds, or infused, directly by divine gift.[6]

The argument is marked by a certain etherealism, an appeal to what a modern literary critic might call the "angelic imagination." [7] The quest for beauty is rather an argument from divine postulates than an attempt to ascend from human experience. Or at any rate it is ordered by a devotion to harmony and unity which in many places seems to entertain little respect for the multiplicity and resistance of the secular principle. The supreme good of the spirit is *monas*, a state of freedom from the discords incident to human life, even from the division intrinsic to sex. Moral evil is *duas*, two-ness, the failure to submit to the power of the One.[8] From such principles it follows more or less plausibly—though perhaps not with strict necessity—that among geometrical figures an equilateral triangle is more beautiful than a scalene, a square even more beautiful than an equilateral triangle, and a circle the most beautiful figure of all.[9] One likes the doors and windows of a house to be arranged symmetrically.[1] Here is a critical spirit which if not militantly anti-dramatic seems at least largely indifferent to whatever aesthetic claims may be enjoyed by the principle of division or conflict. Like Plotinus, Augustine seems to understand beauty as arising through a unity which occurs in spite of, or aside from, the diversity of parts. Certainly this beauty does not arise *through*, or at least not in virtue of, that diversity.

It may be with some surprise that we encounter certain remarks which Augustine let fall in other connections. A work of art, he will say

[3] *De Ordine* II, xii.
[4] *De Musica* VI, ii.
[5] W. F. Jackson Knight, *St. Augustine's De Musica* (London, 1949).
[6] *De Vera Religione* I, xxx–xxxi.
[7] Allen Tate, *The Forlorn Demon* (Chicago, 1953), esp. p. 37; William F. Lynch, "Theology and the Imagination," *Thought*, XXIX (Spring, 1954), esp. p. 76.
[8] *De Ordine* II, xv–xix; Gilbert and Kuhn, pp. 133–4, citing K. Svoboda, *L'Esthétique de St. Augustine et ses Sources*, Brno, 1933.
[9] *De Quantitate Animae* I, ix.
[1] *De Ordine* II, xi.

in one place, has its own truth, and just in virtue of its being a particular species of falsehood. An artist cannot be true to himself unless he is in a sense a maker of lies.[2] Again: Rightly attuned souls will look at all things in their contexts. Beauty cannot bear scrutiny in isolation. Augustine is indeed able to countenance something very much like an artistic theory of harmony *through* contrast, beauty *in* variety: Poets use even barbarisms and solecisms to "season" their poetry; sweet music is made sweeter by the consonance of differing voices; a drama needs clowns and villains to bring out the virtue of the heroes.[3]

One problem which somewhat puzzled Augustine concerned the appearance of symbols in the Scriptures. Why was it pleasant to linger in symbols? to prefer the outer show to the inner and pure meaning? Was it commendable? The more remote or difficult the divine symbol (the lion, the panther, the bear, the worm), the more difficult perhaps the problem. Another writer of the patristic era, the Pseudo-Dionysius, speaks (almost in what nowadays we might call "metaphysical" terms) of incongruity, shock and stimulus to the mind in unravelling mystery.[4] Augustine himself engages in a meditation which comes close to stating, if not so close to solving, one of the main problems of literary criticism in every age.

> I feel greater pleasure in contemplating holy men, when I view them as the teeth of the Church, tearing men away from their errors. . . . It is with the greatest pleasure too that I recognize them under the figure of sheep that have been shorn. . . . But why I view them with greater delight under that aspect than if no such figure were drawn from the sacred books, though the fact would remain the same, is another question, and one very difficult to answer. Nobody, however, has any doubt about the facts, both that it is pleasanter in some cases to have knowledge communicated through figures, and that what is attended with difficulty in the seeking gives greater pleasure in the finding.[5]

V

NINE hundred years later than Augustine, Thomas Aquinas turned the preoccupation of Christian metaphysics from the Platonic realm yonder

[2] *Soliloquia* II, x. Cf. *Confessions* III, vi; Gilbert and Kuhn, p. 126.

[3] *De Ordine* II, iv. Gilbert and Kuhn, p. 138, point out that Plotinus had said: "Take away the low characters and the power of the drama is gone; they are part and parcel of it."

[4] *De Coelesti Hierarchia* II ("*Quod apte res divinae atque coelestes dissimilibus etiam signis explicentur*"), v (in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J. C. Migne, III, 143–6). Cf. Gilbert and Kuhn, p. 154–5.

[5] *De Doctrina Christiana* II, vi, quoted by Gilbert and Kuhn, pp. 153–4, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st Series, II (Buffalo, 1887), 537. Cf. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, XXXIV, 38–9.

of forms to an Aristotelian, immediately experienced world of natural substances. It was a world, however, which pointed upwards (like a cathedral, says Henry Adams) to a transcendentally substantive and personal God.[6] Between the dreaminess of Plotinian pantheistic immanence and the concrete, particular, historical claim of Christianity there was a difference which was bound to develop sooner or later theoretical differences at the aesthetic as well as at the metaphysical and theological levels. The Plotinian theory of emanation, a theory of continuity between Creator and created, a shading of values, is supplanted in the Christian Aristotelianism of Aquinas by an emphatic distinction between God and his works. Our apprehension of God, the source of the beautiful, is not by any kind of either spiritual or abstractive suffusion, as, for instance, of light from an inner stage seen through a gauze curtain, but by a clear apprehension of, and reasoning from, the separate works of His hand. The philosophy of the first ten or twelve centuries of the Christian era had been, for that matter, not only a Platonic attack on materialism (at some moments even carried to the extreme of "iconoclasm" [7]) but alternatively, in certain phases, a realistic (and in that sense a materialistic) defense of this world against the Gnostic and Manichaean rarefactions of value.[8] A certain kind of beauty, a serenely abstracted and ordered cosmos of neo-Platonism (in which abstraction itself was spirituality and divinity)—like the columns of a Greek temple distant upon a hill in a luminous mist—was cut across and wrecked by the concretely historical, bloody and suffering claim of Christianity. A fourth-century Roman philosopher, Eunapius, called it a "fabulous and formless darkness mastering the loveliness of the world." [9] And a modern Irish poet has echoed:

> The Roman Empire stood appalled:
> It dropped the reins of peace and war
> When that fierce virgin and her Star
> Out of the fabulous darkness called.[1]

Yet we may be disappointed if we look to Aquinas or to other theologians of the high Middle Ages for any new and more concrete theory of beauty, of fine art in general, or of poetry. In the aesthetic remarks of Aquinas—remarks occurring mainly at three places in his

[6] See the elaboration of this image by Henry Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (Boston, 1927), p. 382.

[7] Cf. Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetic*, pp. 132–9.

[8] Cf. Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Edward Bullough (London, 1937), Ch. 17, esp. p. 354; Thomas Gilby, *Poetic Experience* (New York, 1934), pp. 23–4.

[9] Eunapius, *Vita Maximi*, quoted by E. R. Dodds, *Select Passages Illustrating Neoplatonism* (London, 1923), p. 8.

[1] W. B. Yeats, "Two Songs from a Play," *Collected Poems* (New York, 1942), p. 246, by permission of The Macmillan Company.

Summa Theologiae[2] and in his opuscular commentary on the *Divine Names* of Dionysius—we have a discussion of "beauty" precisely as a "Divine Name." "Beauty" belongs to form and intelligence, and hence pre-eminently to the contemplative life.[3] If we try to take Aquinas in the most secular or natural way we can—looking at what he says about the objects in this world which are the analogical starting points for our knowledge of Divine beauty and at what he says about the human experience of perceiving beauty, we find a kind of tabloid and laconic, even casual, codification of the principles with which we are familiar in the earlier centuries of neo-Platonism. Beautiful things, he says, are those which are apprehended with pleasure—*quae visa placent*—and thus he parallels Augustine in giving his simplest definition of the beautiful a subjective accent. As with Augustine and Plotinus, we are once more in the presence of a basic assumption of radical harmony between man the knower and the external universe which he knows—and in some parts of which he takes a special delight. The beauty of a beautiful object consists not merely in a self-enclosed character but in a corresponding external relation of fitness to the knowing subject, a relation of knowability. All knowledge, and especially knowledge of the beautiful, and pleasure in the beautiful, arise by a kind of union between subject and object.[4]

As for that object itself, the cognitive counterpart of aesthetic pleasure, it must have three qualities (*tria requiruntur*): wholeness or perfection (*integritas sive perfectio*), due proportion or harmony (*debita proportio sive consonantia*), and brilliance (*claritas*). The term "harmony" may sound sufficiently broad, but it is worth noting that in this passage Aquinas seems to be thinking chiefly about the kind of "harmony" that obtains between an image and what it images. This requirement for beauty, he says, is found in the Son because he is the "express image of the Father" (*inquantum est imago expressa Patris*).[5] No doubt the Stoic

[2] *Summa Theologiae* I, 5, 4, ad 1m (*quae visa placent*); I, 39, 8 (*tria requiruntur*); I-II, 27, 1, ad 3m (*sensus maximi cognoscitivi*). Works of Aquinas are conveniently consulted in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis . . . Opera Omnia*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke, vols. I-XXV (New York: Musurgia Publishers, 1948–50). This is a photographic reproduction of the edition at Parma, 1852–73.

[3] "*Et ideo in vita contemplativa, quae consistit in actu rationis, per se et essentialiter inventur pulchritudo.*" *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 180, 2, ad 3m.

[4] "*Sensus delectantur in rebus debite proportionatis, sicut in sibi similibus. . . . Et cognitio fit per assimilationem, assimilitudo autem respicit formam*" (*Summa Theologiae* I, 5, 4, ad 1m). Concerning the peculiarly subjective and emotive kind of knowledge called by neo-Thomists "knowledge through connaturality" or "knowledge through affective connaturality," see Thomas Gilby, *Poetic Experience* (New York, 1934), p. 21; Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, 1953), pp. 117–25. See de Bruyne I, 26 and III, 23 on musical and visual harmonies between man and the universe in different phases of medieval aesthetics.

[5] *Summa Theologiae* I, 39, 8. Echoing Aristotle and other ancient writers, Aquinas adds that an image is said to be beautiful if it perfectly represents even an ugly object (*Unde videmus quod aliqua imago dicitur esse pulchra, si perfecte repraesentat rem, quamvis turpem*). It is perhaps permissible to reflect further that if an image

criterion of bright color occurs to Aquinas with a special recommendation in the light of the cathedral art with which he was familiar, the Byzantine mosaic, the rose-stained glass of nave or apse,[6] the bright painting of the school of Cimabue. "Bright colored objects," remarks Aquinas, "are said to be beautiful." Yet neo-scholastic commentators hasten to assure us, and plausibly, that such *claritas* is but the accent of perfection in the structural concept. They produce from an opusculum written either by Aquinas or by his master Albertus the phrase *resplendentia formae*—"the splendor of form shining upon the proportioned parts of matter, or upon diverse powers or actions." [7] In Aquinas, as in most of the theological and aesthetic writers of his century, and notably the Franciscans, we find the Plotinian and Platonic philosophy of light more radiant than ever. *Claritas, splendor, resplendentia, fulgor, lux, lumen*—such words recur throughout theological writing with almost as much frequency as words relating to *form* itself or to unity and being.[8] And we are not surprised to read in this context, as we have read before in Plato, Plotinus, and Augustine, that sight and hearing are the senses which preeminently open on beauty, because they are the preeminently intellectual senses (*maxime cognoscitivi*).[9]

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is proportioned to an object (even an ugly object), the image by that very fact will have its own, internal, proportion or harmony, corresponding to the degree of harmony which the object must have in order to be an object at all. See the interesting speculation of Dorothy Sayers on "Trinitarian" aspects of poetic creation, *Unpopular Opinions* (London, 1946), p. 37, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic." John A. Duffy, *A Philosophy of Poetry Based on Thomistic Principles* (Washington, D.C., 1945), pp. 28–9, lists a number of passages on beauty in which Aquinas uses such terms as *consonantia, ordo, proportio* in a more directly internal sense to mean relation or location of parts (*situs partium*).

[6] Cf. Robert Grinnell, "Iconography and Philosophy in the Crucifixion Window at Poitiers," *Art Bulletin*, XXVIII (September, 1946), 171–96.

[7] *Opusculum de Pulchro et Bono* I, 6, 2. Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (New York, 1943), pp. 25, 160; Leonard Callahan, *A Theory of Esthetic, According to the Principles of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C., 1927), pp. 31, 89, 126, quoting *Opuscula Selecta S. Thomae Aquinatis* (Paris, 1908) XXI, *De Pulchro et de Bono:* "[*Pulchrum*] *congregat omnia, et hoc habet ex parte formae cujus resplendentia facit pulchrum. . . . Secundum autem quod forma resplendet super partes materiae, sic est pulchrum habens rationem congregandi. . . . Ratio pulchri in universali consistit in resplendentia formae super partes materiae proportionatas, vel super diversas vires, vel actiones.*"

[8] Gilbert and Kuhn, p. 141. For an extended account of the pervasive 13th-century neo-Platonic and Biblical philosophy of light—an aesthetic of light, mystical, physical, and cosmological—see de Bruyne III, 3–29, "*L'esthétique de la lumière.*" See Robert Grosseteste, *On Light*, trans. Clare C. Riedl (Milwaukee, 1942).

[9] "*Illi sensus praecipue respiciunt pulchrum qui maxime cognoscitivi sunt, scilicet visus et auditus rationi deservientes: dicimus enim pulchra visibilia et pulchros sonos; non enim dicimus pulchros sapores aut odores*" (*Summa Theologiae* I–II, 27, 1, ad 3m). The opinion of Aquinas seems, however, by no means rigid. Other passages (*Summa Theologiae* I, 91, 3, ad 3m; *In Libris Aristotelis De Coelo et Mundo Expositio* II, 14) suggest that he looked upon the human pleasure in smelling flowers as close to the beautiful when compared with an animal's pleasure in smelling food. See John A. Duffy, *A Philosophy of Beauty . . .*, p. 62.

Beauty is thought to be apprehended in a kind of reposeful contemplation (*pulchrum . . . cuius ipsa apprehensio placet*) [1] and in that sense is different from the good (*bonum*),[2] which is the object of appetite. The conception is much better known to modern aestheticians under its Kantian name of "disinterest." There may be difficulties here, relating to the fact that the very act of knowing is a kind of possessing, so that "possession" in the sense of control or ownership, though less often requisite for aesthetic knowing than for other kinds of knowing, is scarcely the crux of the argument. We know the picture that we see in the art gallery (or in our own collection), and we know the apple that we eat, and it is these two kinds of knowledge or possession that must be compared—the amorphic and even destructively internal possession of the apple and the more coolly distanced ocular union with the picture. The pleasure afforded by a thing we call beautiful—whether a natural object or a product of art—would seem to differ from other pleasures in being more steady and cumulative and more surely held by the mind, and more charged with symbolic intimations. In the case of the overtly symbolic or referential arts at least, and especially in that of verbal arts, it is easy to make a distinction between those, the rhetorical, whose end is persuasory and dynamic (to move us toward their referents) and those others, the poetic —sometimes nowadays called the "autotelic"—arts, which seem to absorb the interest of their referents and hold it in themselves by a kind of symbolic suspension.

One of the most striking technical feats of Thomist aesthetic consists in its being able to confront rather squarely that paradox of the two stones —plain beauty and excellently carved beauty—which was bequeathed by Plotinus. This is accomplished through one of the central concepts of the metaphysics, that of "analogy," the very concept by which the whole world of created reality is kept both dependent upon and apart from God. Both above and below, beauty is in everything. It is a transcendental, surpassing "all limits of kind or category." It is always relative to the individual form.[3] It is predicated differently (that is, analogously) of each beautiful object in the wide variety of objects to which we give that

[1] *Summa Theologiae* I–II, 271, ad 3m. Cf. *In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus Expositio* IV, v, 356: "*Quamvis autem pulchrum et bonum sint idem subiecto, quia tam claritas quam consonantia sub ratione boni continentur, tamen ratione differunt: nam pulchrum addit supra bonum, ordinem ad vim cognoscitivam illud esse huiusmodi*" (ed. Fra Ceslai Pera, O.P., Turin and Rome, 1950, p. 115).

[2] Yet the distinction again is hardly rigid. *Summa Theologiae* II–II, 145, 2, "*Utrum honestum sit idem quod decorum*," argues that moral good is spiritual beauty: "*Et ideo honestum est idem spirituali decori. Unde Augustinus dicit . . . 'Honestum voco intelligibilem pulchritudinem, quam spiritualem nos proprie dicimus.'*"

[3] "*Pulchritudo quodamodo dicitur per respectum ad aliquid. Alia enim est pulchritudo spiritus et alia corporis, atque alia hujus et illius corporis*" (*In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus Expositio* IV, v, 339; *ed. cit.*, p. 113).

name. As one neo-Thomist,[4] with his eye on the logical and semantic difficulties involved, has put it: we use an ordinary, literal specific term like "man" in a way that does not admit the idea of more or less and in a way that is standard or univocal. Jack is not less a man than Jim, and each is a man in just the same way and for just the same reason. But it is clear that the contrary is true of a term like "beauty." Beauty is indeed everywhere, and it is more or less. And in each case (and most clearly in each case of expressive art) beauty is of a different kind or occurs for a different reason. The details always have to be taken into account in some special way. As another neo-Thomist has said wittily: "The lack of a head or an arm is a serious defect in a woman but of much less account in a statue—whatever disappointment M. Ravaisson may have felt at being unable to *complete* the Venus of Melos." [5]

For such reasons, the discussion of the term "beauty" in Aquinas is not closely related to, and is not at all dependent upon, the discussion of the term "art," however close or inevitable the association between the two terms may have come to seem in later times. Art in the Middle Ages is just the right way of making whatever anybody happens to be making (*recta ratio factibilium*)—each artifact according to its own plan, in a hierarchy, a cathedral being worth more than a cowshed, but each one right (and beautiful) in its own way. In this hierarchy there were, from a modern point of view, certain curious placements—painting in the same class with saddle-making, for instance, because saddles were painted.[6] The physical, servile, or mechanical arts in general (not only saddle-making and shoe-making but sculpture, architecture, and painting) were on a plane inferior to that of the seven liberal arts named in the canon of the encyclopedist Martianus Capella: grammar, rhetoric, logic, dialectic, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. And these in turn were, of course, inferior to the theological arts. The medieval conception viewed from its lower end (the root of any functionalist theory of art) has been neatly epitomized in our century by the neo-Thomist sculptor and theorist Eric Gill in the title of his book *Beauty Looks After Herself*. "To make a drain pipe," he says in another book, "is as much the work of an artist as it is to make paintings or poems." [7] Properly speaking, there are no fine arts in such a system. The neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain offers us his own version of the two stones of Plotinus when he says that what we now call the fine arts are right ways of making which are some-

[4] Thomas Gilby, *Barbara Celarent* (London, 1949), pp. 78–9.

[5] Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (New York, 1943), p. 27. The joke is not altogether spoiled by the fact that this Hellenistic statue was not made à la Rodin, and that it *would* actually be completed by the restoration of its arms. See R. H. Wilenski, *The Meaning of Modern Sculpture* (London, c. 1933), p. 66.

[6] Gilbert and Kuhn, pp. 157–8.

[7] *Art* (London, 1935), p. 4.

how specially directed to the splendid rightness of beauty—a species is in a peculiar way turned back upon its transcendental genus.[8]

And in all this what of poetry? The literary student will by now have missed any conspicuous mention of poetry either under the Thomist head of beauty (what especially affects the senses of sight and hearing) or under that of art (a discipline of honest making). We hear that the Middle Ages, following such ancient writers as Quintilian and Augustine, were likely to treat poetry as a pendant to logic, or to rhetoric. (The Dutch Meistersingers called themselves rhetoricians, for poetry was a "secondary rhetoric.") Or in deference to Aristotle's dictum, repeated by Aquinas, that one cannot think logically without framing images, poetry might be made a propaedeutic to logic.[9] The student who inquires about poetry in the system of Aquinas himself will search the texts to find poetry treated only here and there. either as a problem in semantics—the locale of a kind of subrational metaphoric evasion (to be distinguished from theological analogy) [1]—or as an art of verbal reasoning lower even than sophistic or rhetoric (that is, at the bottom) in a scale which has Aristotelian metaphysical demonstration at the top.[2]

> Poetic knowledge concerns matters which through a deficiency in their truth cannot be laid hold of by the reason; hence the reason has to be beguiled by means of certain similitudes. Theology, on the other hand, deals with matters which are above reason. So the symbolic mode is common to both types of discourse; neither type is suited to reasoning.[3]

VI

THE train of sceptical and scientific thinking which began with Galileo and Descartes was not friendly to the kind of aesthetic we have been

[8] *Art and Scholasticism* (New York, 1943), pp. 33–4. See his later adjustment of this view—beauty an "end beyond the end" of "poetry," a "transcendental correlative"—in *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, 1951), pp. 167–71.

[9] Gilbert and Kuhn, p. 157. Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima* III, 7; Aquinas, *In Boethii de Trinitate* 6, 2, ad 5m.

[1] Cf. Walter J. Ong, "Wit and Mystery: A Revaluation," *Speculum*, XXII (1947), 324.

[2] Cf. Walter J. Ong, "The Province of Rhetoric and Poetic," *Modern Schoolman*, XIX (1942), 25, quoting Aquinas, *In I. Analytica Posteriora*, lectio 1.

[3] "*Ad tertium dicendum, quod poetica scientia est de his quae propter defectum veritatis non possunt a ratione capi; unde oportet quod quasi quibusdam similitudinibus ratio seducatur: theologia autem est de his quae sunt supra rationem; et ideo modus symbolicus utrique communis est, cum neutra rationi proportionetur.*" *Commentum in Primum Librum Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi, Prologus*, q.1, a5, ad 3m. See M.-D. Chenu, O.P., *Introduction à l'Étude de Saint Thomas D'Aquin* (Montreal, 1950), pp. 93, 144, for a succinct statement of the opposition between the Aristotelian and scholastic scientific Latin style of Aquinas and the Platonic and Augustinian poetical styles of irony, metaphor, and symbol.

sketching, at least not to its ontological supports, Platonic or Thomistic. Yet as early as the late 17th century and notably in the *Monadology* and related essays and letters of Leibniz, an idealistic reaction set in which was not without affinities for neo-Platonism and which, if pursued through German aesthetics of the later 18th century to the flowering of German and English criticism,[4] would provide a chain of statements about beauty through unity and order[5] with which one might amply continue our history. The kind of "organic" unity acclaimed by Coleridge and the Germans, with its strongly pantheistic implications about the organic structure of the universe and the union in knowledge and being of subject and object, will be a part of our theme in later chapters (17 and 18). By the end of the 19th century, several forms of idealism had become available for litterateurs of a metaphysical bent. They might turn to various romantic and neo-Platonic forms—or, just after 1900, to Crocean expressionism. It was a distinct anachronism, however, that the novelist James Joyce should at about that date allow an acquaintance with scholastic philosophy gained in his school days with the Jesuits in Clongowes and Dublin to determine the character of the rather elaborate exposition of an aesthete's creed which occurs toward the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.*[6] An account of this retrospective and romanticized piece of scholasticism may serve appropriately as a conclusion to the present chapter and to the present section of our history. In a rather florid, even pompous, yet sufficiently accurate style of schoolroom metaphysics Stephen Dedalus expounds to his friend Lynch a series of freely rendered Thomistic theses.

> You see I use the word *arrest.* I mean that the tragic emotion is static. Or rather the dramatic emotion is. The feelings excited by improper art are kinetic, desire or loathing. . . . The arts which excite them, pornographical or didactic, are therefore improper arts. The esthetic emotion . . . is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing.—*Portrait,* p. 205
>
> Aquinas . . . says that is beautiful the apprehension of which pleases. p. 207

. . .

[4] See a convenient summary by James Benziger, "Organic Unity: Leibniz to Coleridge," PMLA, LXVI (March, 1951), 24–48.

[5] See for instance Coleridge's three essays "On the Principles of Genial Criticism," *Biographia Literaria* (ed. J. Shawcross), II, esp. p. 239.

[6] "The lore . . . was only a garner of slender sentences from Aristotle's Poetics and Psychology and a *Synopsis Philosophiae Scholasticae ad mentem divi Thomae.*" The *Synopsis* is apparently not to be identified with any school book actually used by Joyce. The quotations from *A Portrait of the Artist* which follow in our text are from the Viking Compass Edition, New York, 1956, by permission of The Viking Press, Inc.

> . . . all people who admire a beautiful object find in it certain relations which satisfy and coincide with the stages themselves of all esthetic apprehension. p. 209

> Aquinas says: *Ad pulcritudinem tria requiruntur integritas, consonantia, claritas.* . . . Do these correspond to the phases of apprehension? p. 211

> The synthesis of immediate perception is followed by the analysis of apprehension. Having first felt that it is one thing, you feel now that it is a thing. You apprehend it as complex, multiple, divisible, separable, made up of its parts, the result of its parts and their sum, harmonious. That is *consonantia.* p. 212

> . . . you make the only synthesis which is logically and esthetically permissible. You see that it is that thing which it is and no other thing. The radiance of which he speaks is the scholastic *quidditas,*[7] the *whatness* of a thing. . . . The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure.—p. 213

We have Aquinas, we might say, with inverted emphasis, or the *tria* of required objective qualities seen upside down in the deep pool of the poet's imagination. It is an idealistic modification which rings very naturally against the background of the preceding century. The other form of idealism, the Platonic or purely symbolic, by which beauty is "a light from some other world, the idea of which matter was but the shadow," is explicitly rejected by Stephen (pp. 212–13). "That is literary talk." And to complete the account, it is worth noting that in Joyce's earlier and longer version of the *Portrait* entitled *Stephen Hero,* the idea of "claritas" has a somewhat different accent.

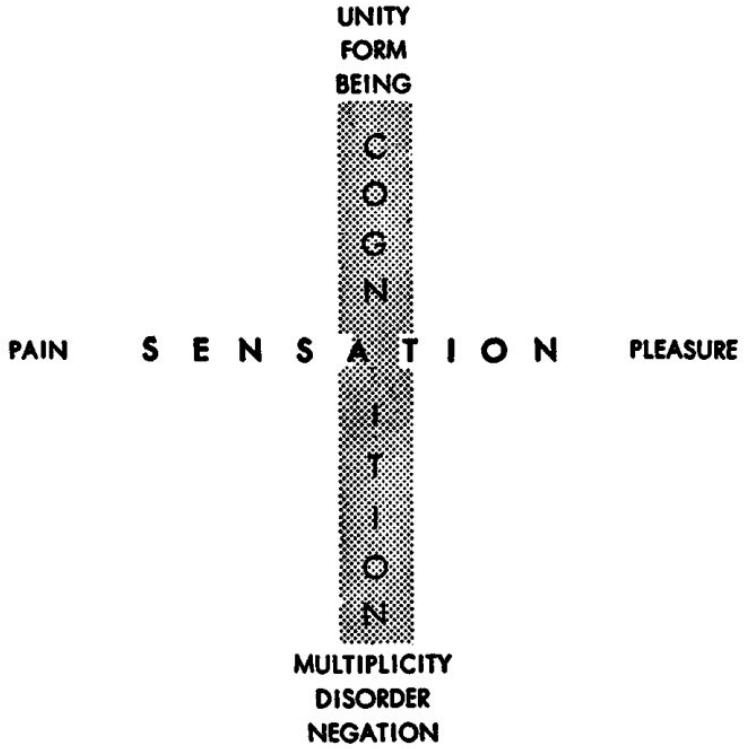
> *Claritas* is *quidditas.* After the analysis which discovers the second quality the mind makes the only possible synthesis and discovers the third quality. This is the moment which I call epiphany. First we recognize that the object is *one* integral thing, then we recognize that it is an organized composite structure, a *thing* in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognize that it is *that* thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object,

[7] As Stephen expounds the matter, this radiance is more like scholastic *haecceitas* or individuality. *Quidditas* is actually the Aristotelian specific universal, the essence of the main class to which the individual belongs. See Aquinas, *On Being and Essence,* ed. A. A. Maurer (Toronto, 1949).

> the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany.[8]

There is more about discovery here, less about a phase of apprehension and feeling. More about the soul of the object, less about the imagination of the artist. With its now current Joycean word *epiphany*, the passage may strike us as more clearly like Joyce himself and significantly less like Stephen Dedalus, rebellious aesthete, scribbler of *fin de siècle* verses, "priest of the eternal imagination."

Taken as a dual statement and dramatically ambiguous emphasis on the relation between object and response in the experience of the beautiful, the aesthetic of Stephen Dedalus may be thought of as epitomizing and holding unresolved a choice that has haunted not only aesthetics but general epistemology since early times. The answers we have been hearing up to now have borne far more heavily on object than on response or feeling. We have yet to hear the opposite case in any strength. By way of anticipating some of the main themes of the history which lies ahead of us and of indicating their relation to what has gone before, one might draw a diagram of two radically opposed axes of aesthetic theory, thus:



The classical theories of antiquity range themselves along the vertical axis, with Plotinus one of the most systematic classical spokesmen but at the same time the most subjectively idealistic. We have had so far no instance of a theory lying simply along the horizontal axis—though the

[8] *Stephen Hero* (New York, 1944), p. 213. Copyright 1944, 1955 by New Directions and reprinted by permission of the publisher, New Directions.

affective clause—*quod placet*—is somewhat prominent with Aquinas. The era of fully horizontal theory does not appear until the 18th and 19th centuries. In the *Portrait* Stephen guards against one form of affectivism, the exclusively sensate.

> The desire and loathing excited by improper esthetic means are really not esthetic emotions not only because they are kinetic in character but also because they are not more than physical. Our flesh shrinks from what it dreads and responds to the stimulus of what it desires by a purely reflex action of the nervous system. Our eyelid closes before we are aware that the fly is about to enter our eye.—p. 241

Some of the most refined theories of aesthetic value which have appeared since the date of the *Portrait* have been attempts to raise the horizontalism of sensate and purely emotive theory into an alignment with the cognitive. Modern aesthetics may be thought of, provisionally, as operating along a line drawn at some intermediate angle of our diagram.

SUPPLEMENT

Eryximachus spoke as follows: . . . . medicine may be regarded generally as the knowledge of the loves and desires of the body, and how to satisfy them or not; and the best physician is he who is able to separate fair love from foul, or to convert one into the other; and he who knows how to eradicate and how to implant love, whichever is required, and can reconcile the most hostile elements in the constitution and make them loving friends, is a skilful practitioner. Now the most hostile are the most opposite, such as hot and cold, bitter and sweet, moist and dry, and the like. And my ancestor, Asclepius, knowing how to implant friendship and accord in these elements, was the creator of our art, as our friends the poets here tell us, and I believe them; and not only medicine in every branch, but the arts of gymnastic and husbandry are under his dominion. Any one who pays the least attention to the subject will also perceive that in music there is the same reconciliation of opposites; and I suppose that this must have been the meaning of Heracleitus, although his words are not accurate; for he says that The One is united by disunion, like the harmony of the bow and lyre. Now there is an absurdity in saying that harmony is discord or is composed of elements which are still in a state of discord. But what he probably meant was, that harmony is composed of differing notes of higher or lower pitch which disagreed once, but are now reconciled by the art of music; for if the higher and lower notes still disagreed, there could be no harmony,—clearly not. For harmony is a symphony, and symphony is an agreement; but an agreement of disagreements while they

disagree there cannot be; you cannot harmonize that which disagrees. In like manner rhythm is compounded of elements short and long, once differing and now in accord; which accordance, as in the former instance, medicine, so in all these other cases, music implants, making love and unison to grow up among them; and thus music, too, is concerned with the principles of love in their application to harmony and rhythm. Again, in the essential nature of harmony and rhythm there is no difficulty in discerning love which has not yet become double. But when you want to use them in actual life, either in the composition of songs or in the correct performance of airs or metres composed already, which latter is called education, then the difficulty begins, and the good artist is needed.

—Plato, *Symposium*, 186–7, trans. Benjamin Jowett

Do love and harmony arise through diversity, or in spite of diversity?